

# Reading, Writing, and Researching for History

## A Guide for College Students

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# 1.a.

## Introduction

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For all who have taken history courses in college, the experience of writing a research paper is etched indelibly in memory: late nights before the paper is due, sitting in pale light in front of a computer monitor or typewriter, a huge stack of books (most of them all-too-recently acquired) propped next to the desk, drinking endless cups of coffee or bottles of Jolt cola. Most of all, we remember the endless, panicked wondering: how on earth was something coherent going to wind up on the page – let alone fill eight, or ten, or twelve of them? After wrestling with material for days, the pressure of the deadline and level of caffeine in the body rise enough, and pen is finally put to paper. Many hours later, a paper is born – all too often something students are not proud to hand in, and something professors dread grading. "Whatever does not kill us makes us stronger." While Nietzsche may sometimes have been right, he likely did not have writing history papers in mind. On the contrary, I sometimes wonder if students' bad experiences writing papers does not drive some of them away from history. How can we make this process less traumatic, more educational, and ultimately more rewarding for all concerned?

The assignment of preparing a research paper for a college-level history course is an important one which should not be neglected. In no other endeavor are so many history-related skills required of students. Just think of the steps required:

First, students must find a historical problem worth addressing. This is done most often by reading and comparing secondary history sources, such as monographs and journal articles. Simply finding relevant secondary materials requires its own particular set of skills in using the library: searching catalogs, accessing on-line databases, using interlibrary loan, and even knowing how to pose questions to reference librarians. Reading these sources, determining their arguments, and putting them in conversation with each other constitute another broad set of skills which are enormously difficult to master.

Second, having developed a historical problem, students must find a set of primary historical sources which can actually address the question they have formulated. Once again, this is no easy task. It requires another array of skills in using the library. Students must know how to message the on-line library catalog, and perhaps even (gasp!) use the card catalog. They must be willing to explore the stacks, learn to use special collections, travel off-campus to new libraries, or interview informants.

This kind of primary source research demands a diligence and persistence rare in these days of easy Internet access.

Finally, students must put all this information together and actually produce knowledge. They must craft a paper wherein they pose a clear historical problem and then offer a thesis addressing it. In a well-structured, grammatically correct essay, they must work their way through an argument without falling into common historical fallacies. They must match evidence to argument, subordinate little ideas to big ones, and anticipate and pre-empt challenges to their argument.

Phew! It is little wonder that college history students, especially first-years and non-majors, can find the research paper assignment so traumatic. It doesn't help that history professors often have trouble teaching the essay-preparation process. This is understandable. History professors often represent that portion of the undergraduate population that "got it"; we are the students who somehow, often in spite of our professors, learned how to "do history." Having received the information virtually through osmosis, we often do not understand how we think about the history-writing process, let alone how to teach it. By and large, we follow the advice of shoe companies and "just do it."

Most students do not have it so easy. Many do not have the innate passion for the past which propelled history teachers over their steep learning curve. Many do not have learning styles which make them likely candidates for the "osmosis" technique many of us used. These students deserve every opportunity to succeed, and it is important that they do. Even those with little apparent interest in the past need to approach what they read with a critical, analytical eye. In this age of information overload, they need to know how to pose critical questions, uncover the data which can answer their queries, and present their findings to themselves, their employers, and to the world at large.

This set of guides was prepared with these thoughts in mind. In it, I have compiled a wide-ranging set of materials I share with my students at Bowdoin. Not all of the ideas here are my own: some are fairly standard bits of wisdom, others were offered by a very talented and generous group of colleagues, including Betty Dessants, Nicola Denzey, Liz Hutchison, and Susan Tananbaum. I have divided the material into several categories: there are chapters on reading primary and secondary historical sources, the nature of historical arguments, the research process, structuring history papers, writing papers, working with sources, and editing and evaluating our own historical writing. The last chapter includes handouts to accompany a presentation I give on the writing process. You'll find many of the ideas repeated in several sections – such as what makes a good thesis. The more I teach, the more it seems that good reading, writing, and evaluating are deeply linked. I hope that this holistic approach comes through.

Please incorporate these guides into your own teaching or writing as you see fit. You may reproduce any part of this website for your students – I ask only that you properly cite the source. And please let me know how the guides could be more useful. I would be happy to know what works for you.

# 1.b.

## Preparing History Papers The Short Version

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You need to know a lot of things when preparing your paper for a history course. I have prepared extensive online guides for you, and there are a great many published books and websites that offer help. But it is easy to feel overwhelmed by so much information. This short guide is the best introduction to paper writing I can furnish you. It is not comprehensive, but will help you avoid the costliest paper-writing mistakes, and point the way toward further resources.

Formatting basics:

- Your paper should have a title page, on which appears the title of the paper, your name, the course number, the professor's name, and the date.
- Double-space the text, and use a simple font, such as Times Roman 12pt.
- Number of the pages.
- Staple the pages together (do not use clips or fancy binders).

Footnote citations: Each time you quote a work by another author, or use the ideas of another author, you should indicate the source with a footnote. A footnote is indicated in the text of your paper by a small arabic numeral written in superscript, directly following the borrowed material. Each new footnote gets a new number (increment by one); do not repeat a footnote number you've already used, even if the earlier reference is to the same work. The number refers to a note number at the bottom of the page (or following the text of the paper, if you are using endnotes). This note contains the citation information for the materials you are referencing. Do not use parenthetical or other citation formats. The citation format you should use for history papers is called Chicago style. The writing guides listed later in this guide will show you how to cite sources using Chicago style.

Citation formats: While there are standard principles for citing different kinds of sources, each requires its own unique citation format. Thus, a book will be cited differently than will a journal article. Your style manuals (Rampolla and Turabian) explain the differences in these formats. Also, Chicago style requires one way of citing sources in footnotes, and another way for citing sources in your bibliography. (A bibliography is a list of sources you consulted in your research, which appears

at the end of your paper.) Consult your style manuals (Rampolla and Turabian) for the differences in citation formats, and pay close attention to the way you format footnotes and bibliographies in your paper.

Quoting sources in your paper: Most often, you should paraphrase materials from other authors, making sure to cite your sources with a footnote. Sometimes, when the original words of another seem particularly poignant or important, you will want to present those words directly to your reader. There are many rules of quoting material, which can be found in the resources listed at the end of this sheet. Here are some basic rules to get you started:

- When quoting others, any words of another author are placed between double quotation marks, exactly as they appear in the original. Do not put between quote marks any words that do not appear in the original.
- Never simply drop a quotation into your paper. Quotations must be integrated into your own prose. Introduce your speaker to your readers, so they will know who you are quoting.
- Pay close attention to the grammar and syntax of sentences with quotations in them. Just because you are quoting someone does not mean that the standard rules of writing cease to apply. In order to check this, imagine the sentence without the quotation marks; if it is not grammatically correct without quotation marks, it will not be grammatically correct with them.
- Pay close attention to what your style manuals have to say regarding punctuation in your quotations. Commas and periods generally go inside the quote marks.
- Footnotes go after the quotation, and are usually followed by no other punctuation.
- Avoid at all costs the use of brackets to insert clarifying material into your quotations. Instead, simply construct the sentence so that brackets are unnecessary, or consider paraphrasing the material rather than quoting it.

Avoiding plagiarism: The best way to avoid unintentional plagiarism is to take complete and accurate notes, and to cite your sources properly. When taking notes, clearly indicate whether you are paraphrasing a source or quoting it directly. Be sure to include a complete bibliographic citation of the source, so you can create an accurate footnote later. When writing, include a footnote citation for every idea or quotation you use from another author.

Common writing errors to study and avoid (consult Diana Hacker, *Rules for Writers*):

- comma splices and run-on sentences
- tenses: use the simple past tense when speaking of the past
- passive voice: thing something is done to a thing rather than by a thing
- faulty pronoun reference: when pronouns such as “they” lack clear referents
- faulty predication: when nouns do things they cannot do
- parallel structure: when sentences are not balanced

Research basics:

- [Library online catalog](#) ([word search](#))
- Online journals: [Jstor](#) and [Project Muse](#)



- [America: History and Life](#)
- [Library guide to American History](#)
- [Rael's guide to historical research at Bowdoin](#)

Three books you should own:

- Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Bedford Books/St. Martin's Press, 2001). Contains much concise, useful advice, including a guide to Chicago-style citations.
- Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). The standard source for college history writers. Comprehensive presentation of Chicago-style citation formats (as well as other styles).
- Diana Hacker, *Rules for Writers*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996). A standard grammar, useful for identifying and correcting mistakes.

Online guides for citing sources:

- Research and Documentation Online (online guide from Bedford/St. Martin's Press)  
<<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/hacker/resdoc/history/footnotes.htm>>
- A Brief Citation Guide for Internet Sources in History and the Humanities  
<<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/about/citation/>>
- Online! from Bedford's/St. Martin's Press (for electronic sources only)  
<<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/index.html>>
- Citing Electronic Sources (from the Library of Congress)  
<<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/resources/cite/index.html>>

For more information: The principles mentioned here are discussed in greater detail in my online writing guides: "Reading, Writing, and Researching for History: A Guide for College Students"  
<<http://academic.bowdoin.edu/WritingGuides/>>.

# 1.c.

## Avoid Common Mistakes In Your History Paper

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Good writing requires attention to lots of rules and conventions. They may not be fun to learn, but they are vital if you are to communicate your ideas with credibility.

**Number the pages** and staple them together. Why is this so hard to do? Number them by hand if you cannot make your computer do it.

When speaking of those in the past, there is rarely a point in speaking of what they "**felt**." Thomas Jefferson did not "feel" that an agrarian lifestyle was the best security against tyranny, he "said" it, or "believed" it, or "argued" it – anything but felt. Why are students so enamored of "felt"? Perhaps it is a function of our self-help age. Perhaps it feels safer to assert "feelings" rather than beliefs. In any case, it is ahistorical. We can rarely know what those in the past actually felt, and it is more accurate to describe what they say as beliefs rather than feelings.

History should be written in the **past tense**. Use the simple past tense (or "preterite") whenever possible. Use the present tense only when speaking of other historians, or (rarely) when your subject is a text itself. Avoid the subjunctive tense, as in "After serving as minister to France, Jefferson would go on to become the President of the United States." Instead, simply say: "After serving as minister to France, Jefferson became the President of the United States." The subjunctive tense often reveals an author who desires to anticipate something that will come later in the paper; avoid this.

Spell out **numbers** up to 100. Consult Turabian for the rules on using numbers in your papers.

Do not use **contractions**, such as "didn't"; instead, say "did not."

Faulty **pronoun references** are inexcusable at the college level. Pronouns referring to plural referents must be plural. Often, the trouble happens when authors attempt to make language gender neutral. Find the faulty reference in this sentence: "The political candidate could not spread their message because they lacked the resources to control media."

No one writing at the college level should have **sentence fragments, comma splices, or run-on sentences** in their papers. Learn what these are and avoid them! (See Hacker, *Rules for Writers* for more.)

**Sentence fragment:** A sentence fragment is a sentence that is not a sentence because it lacks a subject, verb, or modifying clause. "Jefferson, who served as minister to France during the Critical Period."

**Comma splice:** A comma splice occurs when two clauses are improperly joined with just a comma, as in: "Thomas Jefferson became minister to France, he went on to become President of the United States."

**Run-on sentence:** A run-on sentence is a sentence that is not grammatically correct because Run-ons can be caused by a variety of problems. Usually the culprit is a sentence that is trying to do too much. If you are not sure of your long sentences, break them up into shorter, simpler ones. Here is a sample: "Jefferson, who was schooled at William and Mary and lived the life of an independent farmer and something of a Renaissance man who read avidly and acquired the best private library in America."

**Quotations, footnotes, and bibliographies:** Small matters of style, such as where footnote numbers are placed, the use of commas, or how indenting works, are important. You will be learning and using citation styles for the rest of your life; it is crucial that you become proficient in following them closely. The following examples should help.

Samples of quotations with footnotes.

In the words of J. Theodore Holly, a powerful national affiliation was "all-powerful in shielding and protecting each individual of the race."<sup>12</sup>

At various times, these moralists railed against drinking,<sup>7</sup> theater-going,<sup>8</sup> and even dancing.<sup>9</sup>

"Free the slaves," Delany urged, "and I warrant you, they will not fall short in comparison."<sup>34</sup>

Sample note for a book:

<sup>19</sup>Cyril E. Griffith, *The African Dream: Martin R. Delany and the Emergence of Pan-African Thought* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 129-32.

Sample note for a journal article:

<sup>23</sup>Chris Dixon, "An Ambivalent Black Nationalism: Haiti, Africa, and Antebellum African-American Emigrationism," *Australian Journal of American Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2 (December 1991), 13-14.

Sample bibliography entry for a book:

Griffith, Cyril E. *The African Dream: Martin R. Delany and the Emergence of Pan-African Thought*. University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975.

Sample bibliography entry for a journal article:

Dixon, Chris. "An Ambivalent Black Nationalism: Haiti, Africa, and Antebellum African-American Emigrationism." *Australian Journal of American Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2 (December 1991): 10-25.

Again, there are lots of rules to learn about good writing. This is just a quick guide. It is up to you to learn how to fix your errors. Good writers follow good models. Study and use the assigned writing guide for this class: Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*.

## 2.a.

# How to Read a Secondary Source

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Reading secondary historical sources is a skill which may be acquired and must be practiced. Reading academic material well is an active process that can be far removed from the kind of pleasure reading most of us are used to. Sure, history may sometimes be dry, but you'll find success reading even the most difficult material if you can master these skills. The key here is taking the time and energy to engage the material -- to think through it and to connect it to other material you have covered.

### I: How to read a book

1. Read the title. Define every word in the title; look up any unknown words. Think about what the title promises for the book. Look at the table of contents. This is your "menu" for the book. What can you tell about its contents and structure from the TOC?
2. Read a book from the outside in. Read the foreword and introduction (if an article, read the first paragraph or two). Read the conclusion or epilogue if there is one (if an article, read the last one or two paragraphs). After all this, ask yourself what the author's thesis might be. How has the argument been structured?
3. Read chapters from the outside in. Quickly read the first and last paragraph of each chapter. After doing this and taking the step outlined above, you should have a good idea of the book's major themes and arguments.
4. You are now finally ready to read in earnest. *Don't* read a history book as if you were reading a novel for light pleasure reading. Read through the chapters actively, taking cues as to which paragraphs are most important from their topic sentences. (Good topic sentences tell you what the paragraph is about.) Not every sentence and paragraph is as important as every other. It is up to you to judge, based on what you know so far about the book's themes and arguments. If you can, highlight passages that seem to be especially relevant.
5. Take notes: Many students attempt to take comprehensive notes on the content of a book or article. I advise against this. I suggest that you record your *thoughts about* the reading rather than simply the *details and contents* of the reader. What surprised you? What seemed particularly insightful? What seems suspect? What reinforces or counters points made in other readings? This kind of note taking will keep your reading active, and actually will help you remember the contents of the piece better than otherwise.

II. “STAMP” it: A technique for reading a book which complements the steps above is to answer a series of questions about your reading.

**Structure:** How has the author structured her work? How would you briefly outline it? Why might she have employed this structure? What historical argument does the structure employ? After identifying the thesis, ask yourself in what ways the structure of the work enhances or detracts from the thesis. How does the author set about to make her or his case? What about the structure of the work makes it convincing?

**Thesis:** A thesis is the controlling argument of a work of history. Toqueville argued, for instance, that American society in the first half of the nineteenth century believed itself to be radically oriented towards liberty and freedom while in fact its innate conservatism hid under a homogeneous culture and ideology. Often, the most difficult task when reading a secondary is to identify the author's thesis. In a well-written essay, the thesis is usually clearly stated near the beginning of the piece. In a long article or book, the thesis is usually diffuse. There may in fact be more than one. As you read, constantly ask yourself, "how could I sum up what this author is saying in one or two sentences?" This is a difficult task; even if you never feel you have succeeded, simply constantly trying to answer this question will advance your understanding of the work.

**Argument:** A thesis is not just a statement of opinion, or a belief, or a thought. It is an argument. Because it is an argument, it is subject to evaluation and analysis. Is it a good argument? How is the big argument (the thesis) structured into little arguments? Are these little arguments constructed well? Is the reasoning valid? Does the evidence support the conclusions? Has the author used invalid or incorrect logic? Is she relying on incorrect premises? What broad, unexamined assumptions seem to underlay the author's argument? Are these correct?

Note here that none of these questions ask if *you like* the argument or its conclusion. This part of the evaluation process asks you not for your opinion, but to evaluate the logic of the argument. There are two kinds of logic you must consider: **Internal logic** is the way authors make their cases, *given the initial assumptions, concerns, and definitions* set forth in the essay or book. In other words, assuming that their concern is a sound one, does the argument make sense? **Holistic logic** regards the piece as a whole. *Are the initial assumptions correct? Is the author asking the proper questions? Has the author framed the problem correctly?*

**Motives:** Why might the author have written this work? This is a difficult question, and often requires outside information, such as information on how other historians were writing about the topic. *Don't let the absence of that information keep you from using your historical imagination.* Even if you don't have the information you wish you had, you can still ask yourself, "Why would the author argue this?" Many times, arguments in older works of history seem ludicrous or silly to us today. When we learn more about the context in which those arguments were made, however, they start to make more sense. Things like political events and movements, an author's ideological bents or biases, or an author's relationship to existing political and cultural

institutions often have an impact on the way history is written. On the other hand, the struggle to achieve complete objectivity also effects the ways people have written history. It is only appropriate, then, that such considerations should inform your reading.

**Primaries:** Students of history often do not read footnotes. Granted, footnotes are not exactly entertaining, but they are the nuts and bolts of history writing. Glance occasionally at footnotes, especially when you come across a particularly interesting or controversial passage. What primary sources has the historian used to support her argument? Has she used them well? What pitfalls may befall the historians who uses these sources? How does her use of these kinds of sources influence the kinds of arguments she can make? What other sources might she have employed?

### III. Three important questions to ask of secondary sources

**What does the author say?** That is, what is the author's central claim or thesis, and the argument which backs it up? The thesis of a history paper usually explains how or why something happened. This means that the author will have to (1) tell what happened (the who, where, when, what of the subject); (2) explain how or why it happened.

**Why does the author say it?** Historians are almost always engaged in larger, sometimes obscure dialogues with other professionals. Is the author arguing with a rival interpretation? What would that be? What accepted wisdom is the author trying to challenge or complicate? What deeper agenda might be represented by this effort? (An effort to overthrow capitalism? To justify Euro-Americans' decimation of Native American populations? To buttress claims that the government should pursue particular policies?)

**Where is the author's argument weak or vulnerable?** Good historians try to make a case that their conclusion or interpretation is correct. But cases are rarely airtight – especially novel, challenging, or sweeping ones. At what points is the author vulnerable? Where is the evidence thin? What other interpretations of the author's evidence is possible? At what points is the author's logic suspect? If the author's case is weak, what is the significance of this for the argument as a whole?

## 2.b.

# How to Read a Primary Source

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Good reading is about asking questions of your sources. Keep the following in mind when reading primary sources. Even if you believe you can't arrive at the answers, imagining possible answers will aid your comprehension. Reading primary sources requires that you use your historical imagination. This process is all about your willingness and ability to ask questions of the material, imagine possible answers, and *explain your reasoning*.

I. Evaluating primary source texts: I've developed an acronym that may help guide your evaluation of primary source texts: PAPER.

- Purpose of the author in preparing the document
- Argument and strategy she or he uses to achieve those goals
- Presuppositions and values (in the text, and our own)
- Epistemology (evaluating truth content)
- Relate to other texts (compare and contrast)

### Purpose

- Who is the author and what is her or his place in society (explain why you are justified in thinking so)? What could or might it be, based on the text, and why?
- Why did the author prepare the document? What was the occasion for its creation?
- What is at stake for the author in this text? Why do you think she or he wrote it? What evidence in the text tells you this?
- Does the author have a thesis? What — in one sentence — is that thesis?

### Argument

- What is the text trying to do? How does the text make its case? What is its strategy for accomplishing its goal? How does it carry out this strategy?
- What is the intended audience of the text? How might this influence its rhetorical strategy? Cite specific examples.
- What arguments or concerns does the author respond to that are *not* clearly stated? Provide at least one example of a point at which the author seems to be refuting a position never clearly stated. Explain what you think this position may be in detail, and why you think it.



- Do you think the author is credible and reliable? Use at least one specific example to explain why. Make sure to explain the principle of rhetoric or logic that makes this passage credible.

#### Presuppositions

- How do the ideas and values in the source differ from the ideas and values of our age? Offer two specific examples.
- What presumptions and preconceptions do we as readers bring to bear on this text? For instance, what portions of the text might we find objectionable, but which contemporaries might have found acceptable. State the values we hold on that subject, and the values expressed in the text. Cite at least one specific example.
- How might the difference between our values and the values of the author influence the way we understand the text? Explain how such a difference in values might lead us to misinterpret the text, or understand it in a way contemporaries would not have. Offer at least one specific example.

#### Epistemology

- How might this text support one of the arguments found in secondary sources we've read? Choose a paragraph anywhere in a secondary source we've read, state where this text might be an appropriate footnote (cite page and paragraph), and explain why.
- What kinds of information does this text reveal that it does not seem concerned with revealing? (In other words, what does it tell us without *knowing* it's telling us?)
- Offer one claim from the text which is the author's interpretation. Now offer one example of a historical "fact" (something that is absolutely indisputable) that we can learn from this text (this need not be the author's words).

Relate: Now choose another of the readings, and compare the two, answering these questions:

- What patterns or ideas are repeated throughout the readings?
- What major differences appear in them?
- Which do you find more reliable and credible?

## II. Here are some additional concepts that will help you evaluate primary source texts:

- A. Texts and documents, authors and creators: You'll see these phrases a lot. I use the first two and the last two as synonyms. Texts are historical documents, authors their creators, and vice versa. "Texts" and "authors" are often used when discussing literature, while "documents" and "creators" are more familiar to historians.
- B. Evaluating the veracity (truthfulness) of texts: For the rest of this discussion, consider the example of a soldier who committed atrocities against non-combatants during wartime. Later in his life, he writes a memoir that neglects to mention his role in these atrocities, and may in fact blame them on someone else. Knowing the soldier's possible motive, we would be right to question the veracity of his account.

C. The credible vs. the reliable text:

1. *Reliability* refers to our ability to trust the consistency of the author's account of the truth. A reliable text displays a pattern of *verifiable* truth-telling that tends to render the unverifiable parts of the text true. For instance, the soldier above may prove to be utterly reliable in detailing the campaigns he participated in during the war, as evidenced by corroborating records. The only gap in his reliability may be the omission of details about the atrocities he committed.
2. *Credibility* refers to our ability to trust the author's account of the truth on the basis of her or his tone and reliability. An author who is inconsistently truthful -- such as the soldier in the example above -- loses credibility. There are many other ways authors undermine their credibility. Most frequently, they convey in their tone that they are not neutral (see below). For example, the soldier above may intersperse throughout his reliable account of campaign details vehement and racist attacks against his old enemy. Such attacks signal readers that he may have an interest in not portraying the past accurately, and hence may undermine his credibility, regardless of his reliability.
3. An author who seems quite credible may be utterly unreliable. The author who takes a measured, reasoned tone and anticipates counter-arguments may seem to be very credible, when in fact he presents us with complete balderdash. Similarly, a reliable author may not always seem credible. It should also be clear that individual texts themselves may have portions that are more reliable and credible than others.

D. The objective vs. the neutral text: We often wonder if the author of a text has an "ax to grind" which might render her or his words unreliable.

1. *Neutrality* refers to the stake an author has in a text. In the example of the soldier who committed wartime atrocities, the author seems to have had a considerable stake in his memoir, which was to expunge his own guilt. In an utterly neutral document, the creator is not aware that she or he has any special stake in the construction and content of the document. Very few texts are ever completely neutral. People generally do not go to the trouble to record their thoughts unless they have a purpose or design which renders them invested in the process of creating the text. Some historical texts, such as birth records, may appear to be more neutral than others, because their creators seem to have had less of a stake in creating them. (For instance, the county clerk who signed several thousand birth certificates likely had less of a stake in creating an individual birth certificate than did a celebrity recording her life in a diary for future publication as a memoir.)
2. *Objectivity* refers to an author's ability to convey the truth free of underlying values, cultural presuppositions, and biases. Many scholars argue that no text is or ever can be completely objective, for all texts are the products of the culture in which their authors lived. Many authors pretend to objectivity when they might better seek for neutrality. The author who claims to be free of bias and presupposition should be treated with suspicion: no one is free of their values. The credible author acknowledges and expresses those values so that they may be accounted for in the text where they appear.

- E. Epistemology: a fancy word for a straight-forward concept. “Epistemology” is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of knowledge. How do you know what you know? What is the truth, and how is it determined? For historians who read primary sources, the question becomes: what can I know of the past based on this text, how sure can I be about it, and how do I know these things?
1. This can be an extremely difficult question. Ultimately, we cannot know anything with complete assurance, because even our senses may fail us. Yet we can conclude, with reasonable accuracy, that some things are more likely to be true than others (for instance, it is more likely that the sun will rise tomorrow than that a human will learn to fly without wings or other support). Your task as a historian is to make *and justify* decisions about the relative veracity of historical texts, and portions of them. To do this, you need a solid command of the principles of sound reasoning.

## 2.c.

# "Predatory" Reading

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Reading scholarly material requires a new set of skills. You simply cannot read scholarly material as if it were pleasure reading and expect to comprehend it satisfactorily. Yet neither do you have the time to read every sentence over and over again. Instead, you must become what one author calls a "predatory" reader. That is, you must learn to quickly determine the important parts of the scholarly material you read. The most important thing to understand about a piece of scholarly writing is its argument. Arguments have three components: the problem, the solution, and the evidence. Understanding the structure of an essay is key to understanding these things. Here are some hints on how to determine structure when reading scholarly material:

1. **Think pragmatically.** Each part of a well-crafted argument serves a purpose for the larger argument. When reading, try to determine why the author has spent time writing each paragraph. What does it "do" for the author's argument?
2. **Identify "signposts."** Signposts are the basic structural cues in a piece of writing. Is the reading divided into chapters or sections? Are there subheads within the reading? Subheads under subheads? Are the titles clearly descriptive of the contents, or do they need to be figured out (as in titles formulated from quotations)? Are there words or concepts in the titles (of the piece, and of subheads) that need to be figured out (such as novel words, or metaphors)?
3. **Topic sentences.** Topic sentences (usually the first sentences of each paragraph) are miniature arguments. Important topic sentences function as subpoints in the larger argument. They also tell you what the paragraph that follows will be about. When reading, try to identify how topic sentences support the larger argument. You can also use them to decide if a paragraph seems important enough to read closely.
4. **Evidence.** Pieces of evidence — in the form of primary and secondary sources — are the building blocks of historical arguments. When you see evidence being used, try to identify the part of the argument it is being used to support.
5. **Identify internal structures.** Within paragraphs, authors create structures to help reader understand their points. Identify pairings or groups of points and how they are telegraphed.

Where are they in the hierarchy of the argument? Hierarchy of major points is very important, and the most difficult to determine. Is the point a major or a minor one? How can you tell?

6. **Examine transitions.** Sometimes transitions are throwaways, offered merely to get from one point to another. At other times, they can be vital pieces of argument, explaining the relationship between points, or suggesting the hierarchy of points in the argument.
7. **Identify key distinctions.** Scholars often make important conceptual distinctions in their work.
8. **Identify explicit references to rival scholarly positions.** Moments when a scholar refers directly to the work of another scholar are important in understanding the central questions at stake.
9. **Stay attuned to strategic concessions.** Often authors seem to be backtracking, or giving ground, only to try to strengthen their cases. Examine such instances in your readings closely. Often, these signal moments where authors are in direct conversation with other scholars. Such moments may also help steer you toward the thesis.
10. **Remember that incoherence is also a possibility.** Sometimes it is very difficult to determine how a section of a piece is structured or what its purpose in the argument is. Remember that authors do not always do their jobs, and there may be incoherent or unstructured portions of essays. But be careful to distinguish between writing that is complex and writing that is simply incoherent.

Finally, remember that you cannot read each piece of scholarship closely from start to finish and hope to understand its structure. You must examine it (or sections of it) several times. It is much better to work over an article several times quickly — each time seeking to discern argument and structure — than it is to read it once very closely.

## 2.d.

### Some Keys to Good Reading

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Three important questions to ask of secondary sources:

- **What does the author say?** That is, what is the author's central claim or thesis, and the argument which backs it up? The thesis of a history paper usually explains how or why something happened. This means that the author will have to (1) tell what happened (the who, where, when, what of the subject); (2) explain how or why it happened.
- **Why does the author say it?** Historians are almost always engaged in larger, sometimes obscure dialogues with other professionals. Is the author arguing with a rival interpretation? What would that be? What accepted wisdom is the author trying to challenge or complicate? What deeper agenda might be represented by this effort? (An effort to overthrow capitalism? To justify Euro-Americans' decimation of Native American populations? To buttress claims that the government should pursue particular policies?)
- **Where is the author's argument weak or vulnerable?** Good historians try to make a case that their conclusion or interpretation is correct. But cases are rarely airtight – especially novel, challenging, or sweeping ones. At what points is the author vulnerable? Where is the evidence thin? What other interpretations of the author's evidence is possible? At what points is the author's logic suspect? If the author's case is weak, what is the significance of this for the argument as a whole?

Broad approaches to essay reading:

- What is the general subject of the author's investigation?
- What are the central problems or questions the author is investigating?
- What is the solution or explanation the author offers?
- How does the author go about convincing us that the solution/explanation is correct?  
That is, what is the structure of the argument? What are the major points, and what minor points are subordinated under each major point?

What is the author's argument?

- What is the thesis question?
- What are the premises underlying it?
- What is the thesis?

- What is the “road map”; that is, given this thesis, what are the individual points the author will have to prove to make the thesis be true?
- What assumptions has the author made which remain unaddressed?

There are two general steps to reading scholarship:

**Stage 1: Observation.** What is the author’s argument and how is it structured? *This is the first read through the piece. Your objective is merely to understand what the author is trying to do.*

**Stage 2: Evaluation.** Where is the argument particularly strong or weak? What about it is weak? *This is the second read and subsequence analysis of the piece. Your objective is to evaluate the author’s success in making her or his case.*

- Evaluating argument structure: What are the steps in the argument? How is the author breaking down sub-points? Why might the author be doing it this way? What other possibilities did the author not choose?
- Does the author do what the author sets out to do?
- Was what the author set out to do the right or a useful enterprise in the first place?

# 3.a.

## Argument Concepts

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What is the author's argument?

- What is the thesis question?
- What are the premises underlying it?
- What is the thesis?
- What is the "road map"; that is, given this thesis, what are the individual points the author will have to prove to make the thesis be true?
- What assumptions has the author made which remain unaddressed?

What arguments does the author make that may be challenged?

- Premises underlying thesis question
- Individual points of the argument in the "road map," or body of the work.

If you wanted to challenge this author, how would you go about it?

- Choose one point — either a premise underlying the thesis question, or a part of the author's "road map."
- What kind of primary source evidence would you be looking for to "test" this point? What kinds of primary source evidence would tend to support the author? What kinds would undermine the author's argument?
- The last step would be to go to the primary source evidence itself, and see what you find.

**Two important concepts:**

6. The "valid" argument: an argument structured such that, given that the premises are correct, the conclusion *must* be correct. In the following argument, the premises are not correct, but the argument is still valid, for its logic is correct:
  - p1: Martha Ballard was a midwife
  - p2: All midwives had professional educations
  - c: Therefore Martha Ballard had a professional education
7. The "sound" argument: a valid argument with true premises. The preceding argument is valid but not sound, for not all of its premises are true (p2 is false).
  - This argument is invalid, and hence unsound (despite that its premises are correct):
    - p1: Martha Ballard was a midwife
    - p2: Martha Ballard caught over fifty babies
    - c: All midwives caught over fifty babies



- This argument is sound, for its argument is valid and its premises true:  
p1: Martha Ballard was a midwife  
p2: All midwives catch babies  
c: Martha Ballard caught babies

**A very important thing to remember:** Very often, we confuse good or possible arguments with the arguments a scholar actually made. In evaluating a scholarly argument, you are making claims about what an author has stated. You do not have the freedom to put arguments in authors' mouths; *you must be able to back up every claim you make (about an author's argument) through reference to the text.* There is a distinction between what an author *might* have argued and what the author *did* argue. If it's not in the text, the author did not argue it — even if it would have made a good argument. It is vital to imagine possible arguments, but remember — that enterprise is not the same as determining what the author actually argued.

## 3.b.

# Analyzing Arguments

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This guide is intended to:

- Help you analyze historical arguments. Once you've determined the thesis question and thesis behind an argument, you can use this information to analyze the quality of the argument.
- Help you construct your own historical arguments by helping you understand what makes a good historical argument.

Consider this thesis question, which is the one Frank Tannenbaum asked in *From Slave to Citizen*:

**How did differing patterns of slavery in the Americas lead to differing patterns of post-emancipation race relations in the Americas; specifically, how did these differing historical patterns of slavery make post-emancipation Latin America a better place for people of African descent than the post-emancipation United States?**

What are the premises underlying it?

- There were differing patterns of slavery in the Americas
- These led to differing patterns of post-emancipation race relations
- Latin America is a better place for people of African descent than the United States

Now consider this thesis:

**As evident in patterns of emancipation, slavery (and hence post-emancipation race relations) in the United States was harsher than in Latin America because -- due to a legacy of Catholicism and Roman law -- Latin American slavery recognized to a greater degree the moral value of the slave.**

What is the “road map” for this paper? That is, what is the chain of reasoning this paper *must* pursue if it is to demonstrate the veracity of its thesis?

8. There were differing patterns of slavery in the Americas
9. These determined differing patterns of post-emancipation race relations
10. Latin America is a better place for people of African descent than the United States

*Note that thus far the paper is structured around the premises underlying the thesis question. The veracity of these need to be established before any further claims can be made.*

11. Slavery in the United States was “harsher” than slavery in Latin America.
12. Differences in harshness were due to differences in the degrees to which the institution of slavery recognized the “moral value” or humanity of the slave.
13. Differences in the degrees to which slavery recognized the “moral value” or humanity of the slave resulted from differing religious and legal institutions; Latin America was less harsh due to a legacy of Roman law and Catholicism.

*Note that these are all new claims, which can only be made once the “thesis premises” have been established. Note that much of the paper must deal with simply establishing that the thesis question may be asked.*

How to evaluate this argument:

- Are there any ill-defined terms in the thesis question or thesis? Are there any fuzzy concepts which may make analyzing the veracity of claims difficult or impossible? In this instance, I can find two:
  - What is “harshness” and how is it measured?
  - What does it mean to recognize the “moral value” of the slave?
- Is the logic of the “road map” valid? If the logic of any step in the road map is not valid, the argument may fail, regardless of the veracity of its individual claims.
- Is the veracity of each step of the “road map” demonstrated? If any step of the road map is not sufficiently demonstrated, every conclusion which succeeds it is suspect.

# 3.c.

## How to Ask Good Questions

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**1. Good questions require thought and research.** It is easy to pose a question like “should the atomic bomb have been dropped on Japan?” Such a question is simply an opinion question: it requires no research or special understanding into the problem. One way to begin framing better questions is to steadily add facts into the stew. These complicate your argument, basing it on solid historical premises (which of course you would need to prove in an essay). Think in terms of “givens.” For example:

- *Given that* the Japanese military establishment had vowed to fight to the bitter end, should the United States have dropped the bomb on Japan?
- *Given that* the United States’ government was becoming increasingly concerned with post-war struggles with the Soviet Union, should the United States have dropped the bomb on Japan?
- *Given that* many in the United States expressed what may be called racist views of the Japanese, and in fact interned Japanese Americans in concentration camps during the war, should the United States have dropped the bomb on Japan?
- *Given that* the United States had already embarked on an extensive and deadly campaign of carpet-bombing Japanese cities (like Tokyo), should the United States have dropped the bomb on Japan?

**2. Explore premises and make them explicit.** The questions above are not quite explicit enough. For example, so what if many in the United States were racist towards the Japanese? What does that have to do with the legitimacy of dropping the atomic bombing? Of course, most of us can guess what this author intends: that racism might have pre-disposed the U.S. to drop the bomb on the Japanese without sufficient military or political provocation. But it is very important to not let such assumptions go unstated. It is the task of the author to make *every part of the argument explicit*. In the case of the questions above, each of the unstated premises may be expressed as a more detailed part of the larger question:

- What impact did racism have on the decision to drop the bomb?
- What impact did the brewing Cold War with the Soviet Union have on the decision to drop the bomb?
- What impact did military strategy have on the decision to drop the bomb?

**3. Keep going.** Even these questions can be further broken down:

- Did racism lead the U.S. to drop the bomb on Japan when it would not have done so on Germany? How exactly did American views of the Japanese and Germans differ? How could such popular cultural views have influenced a foreign and military policy thought to be rational?
- What in our dealings with Stalin might have prompted the U.S. to drop the bomb on Japan? Why might U.S. strategists have thought dropping the bomb would have been useful at all?
- What, rationally, could U.S. strategists have considered necessary to win the war against Japan? Why did they press for unconditional surrender when they knew Japan was beaten? What is actually the case that dropping the bomb saved U.S. lives? If so, what about the moral costs of bombing civilian non-combatants?

As you can begin to see, once you start thinking about it, one simple question can lead to a huge chain of questions. Remember, *it is always better to keep asking questions you think you cannot answer than to stop asking questions because you think you cannot answer them*. But this can only happen when you know enough about your subject to know how to push your questioning, and this depends on reading and understanding the assigned material. How can you know that racial stereotypes of the Japanese may have played a key role in the decision to drop the bomb if you have no knowledge of the period?

Finally, you may also note that there are some very large questions underlying this entire debate. What *were* legitimate reasons to drop the bomb and what were not? When is it legitimate to use a weapon of mass destruction, and especially against a civilian population? What moral and ideological factors keep it from happening more frequently? What political and strategic factors permit it under certain circumstances? Such questions may or may not be the immediate subject of your investigations, but you should always be on the lookout for them, and always keep them in mind. Such questions tend to be the ones that make all others worth asking.

# 3.d.

## What Makes a Question Good?

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To prepare any facet of the academic process, be it class discussion, leading class, or composing a paper, you need to be able to formulate for yourself some good critical questions. “Critical,” in this sense, of course, does not mean “mean-spirited” but “analytical.”

Since there are many types of questions which produce a variety of answers, it would be helpful to go over the difference between a “critical” question and a “simple” question:

1. A simple question...

- can be answered with a “yes” or “no” (this is not helpful when trying to elicit further questions, discussion, or analysis).
- contain the answers within themselves.
- can only be answered by a fact, or a series of facts

2. There are also questions which are concerned with morals or values, in the nature of “how do you feel about this text?” While these types of questions often produce interesting discussion (and students therefore tend to like them very much) they have nothing to do with a critical analysis of the text itself, which very often was not written with students in mind as the ideal audience.

3. A critical question...

- leads to more questions
- provokes discussion.
- concerns itself with **audience** and **authorial intent**
- derives from a critical or careful reading of the text, using the hermeneutic of suspicion
- addresses or ties in wider issues or hermeneutical strategies
- moves you out of your own frame of reference (“what does this mean in our context?” to your author’s (“what was the author trying to convey when he/she wrote this? how would the audience have responded?”)

Here are some sample questions. What makes them useful or not so useful?

- Did the Republican Party use racist images of blacks as inferior and immoral to further its cause?
- How did plantation owners try to keep former slaves on the plantation? How did they use vagrancy laws and property rights to do that?

- In the Declaration of Independence the Founding Fathers declared that “all men are created equal.” Yet those like Thomas Jefferson actually held slaves at the time they wrote such statements. Jefferson even had a black mistress, with whom he fathered several children. How could he have been so inconsistent?
- Some of Lincoln’s statements seem contradictory. On the one hand, he says during the Lincoln-Douglas debates that he thinks that blacks are inferior and that they should remain so. On the other, he frequently expressed his disdain for slavery, and in fact sought to free the slaves by preparing the Emancipation Proclamation. How do these conflicting statements and actions influence our view of Lincoln?
- (In considering photographs of the Civil War, and illustrations from magazines like *Harper’s Weekly* and *Leslie’s Illustrated*.) Art is able to illustrate a story, but it is done so through the eyes of the cultural context and time period. Once again we are seeing a reinterpretation of a story, and not necessarily the reality. Do we pick and choose which version suits us? Can there be so many sides to the stories about the Civil War? Do you think some or all of these images have some truth to them. If we put them all together would we get the whole story?
- Smith says that “the sort of stories made up about a man are often better evidence, more penetrating characterizations, than are exact reports of his actions” (Smith 149). As this applies to Lincoln, what do you think? Does this allow us to understand him more or simply work to confuse and frustrate us?

## 3.e.

# From Observation to Hypothesis

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As I've said before in class, there is no more important task for the scholar than asking questions. Asking questions – good, scholarly questions, is both a technique which can be learned, and an art which must be intuited. Let's see how the process begins. Consider the following primary source:

*Affidavit of a Georgia freedwoman, 1866. My husband and I lived in Florida about four months. During that time he beat and abused me. I reported it to the officer in charge of the Freedman's Bureau. He had him arrested, and he got out of the guard house and left the place, remaining away until a new officer took charge. He then came back and beat me again. I had him arrested. He knocked the officer down and ran away and came here to Savannah. Since that time he has abused me and refuses to pay for the rent of my room and has not furnished me with any money, food, or clothing. I told him that I would go to the Freedmen's Bureau. He replied, "Damn the Freedmen's Bureau--I'll cuss you before them." On Saturday night, he came to my room and took all his things. He told me he would rather keep a woman than be married because she could not carry him to law and I could. I then told him that if he wanted to leave me to get a divorce and he could go. He said, "If I can get a divorce without paying for it, I'll get it for you. If I can't I won't give it to you, you can go without it." I said, "If you want to leave me, leave me like a man!" He has no just complaint against me.*

Observation derived from primary source: This document depicts a freedmen's physical abuse of his wife.

Thought: *This seems like an instance of gender oppression. But we've been thinking about things in terms of race. Plus, this is strange: we've just seen enslaved African Americans become free; now we see evidence of gender conflict. (Why is this "strange"?) I guess it's strange because I expected the expansion of freedom for all blacks to have been shared equally among black men and women. Perhaps this was not so.*

Hypothesis: *Are these two things — emancipation and gender conflict — related? If so, how? Did emancipation cause gender conflict? If so, how? Did freedom intensify conflicts that existed before? Why would freedom have intensified conflict — what about it would do that?* (Note that this process is about mulling over possibilities. When I ask, "if so, how?" I then respond with several options. This process of considering alternative possible answers is crucial!)



The big question: *How did emancipation affect gender conflict between African-American men and women?* (But wait – that is too general a question! — you’ve already moved past that in your thinking. This is more a statement of theme: the relationship between the general emancipation of enslaved African Americans and gender conflict between black men and women.)

Here is what else you’ve thought about:

There may have been a rise in gender conflict after emancipation

It may have been more than coincidental — there may be a causal relationship

Here is what I’ve not clarified:

What do I mean when I say *gender* oppression? Who oppressed who, exactly? (Of course, I mean that men oppressed women. This is obvious, but I’ve yet to say it yet.)

What do I mean when I say *oppression*? Is there just one kind of oppression? If not, how many kinds are there? What kind am I looking at here? (Many of these I can’t answer yet, yet I do know that what I mean here by “oppression” is that the husband beat and abandoned his wife.)

So I could reformulate my question to make it more specific: What about emancipation caused an increase in the physical abuse and abandonment of African-American women by African-American men?

Questions to ask when asking questions:

- What words, phrases, or concepts in my questions have yet to be explored?
- What assumptions have I made (or are implicit) in the questions I’ve asked?
- What are the parts or components of my question?
- How would I go about testing my hypotheses?
- What would a possible answer or solution look like?

# 4.a.

## Research Papers

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**Arguments and the thesis:** The best papers are not droll surveys of historical data, but *arguments*. That is, they stake out a *thesis* (a conclusion or historical argument) and try to support it. Arguing a point provides focus for your paper; it engages you as the author and challenges you to think critically.

**Developing your topic:** The best way to devise a thesis to argue is to pose yourself questions about subjects that interest you. What was behind lynching: was it economic or psychological? How did African Americans feel about participating in World War II: were they happy or ambivalent? How successful was non-violence as a strategy during the Civil Rights movement? These are examples of questions or problems that can lead you into theses. You start out by looking into the question you set for yourself. As you learn more, you refine your question until you develop the problem that will guide you through your paper-writing. Ideally, your question will be interesting enough to let you do a sophisticated paper, yet narrow enough to be manageable. I can help you develop a problem and narrow your topic once you have expressed an interest in a particular time or subject.

**Sources:** The sources you will use will provide the raw data from which you will seek to answer the question you pose for yourself. In order to get you thinking and writing quickly, I will work closely with you to determine the sources you will use. This will prevent you from spending all your time simply finding material. All of the material we will use will be readily available. Some sources are more challenging to get and use than others; be realistic about what you are willing to do.

### PAPER WRITING STEPS

Here are the steps involved in writing a paper.

**Start out:** Develop a problem and select primary sources in consultation with me.

**Find primary sources:** Locate the primary sources you will use. Check them out, if possible. If not, determine how and when you will use them (as in the case of microfilm, etc.). Consult with me about useful sources.

**Research:** Take notes from your primary sources. It is best to do this on note cards, so that you can arrange notes by topic when you prepare to write. *Make sure to note on each card the source for the note, so you can footnote it later.*

**Analyze notes:** Every night after you have taken notes, look over all the note cards you have compiled so far. Do this even if you have just started taking notes. Look over your notes, noting interesting recurring patterns in your data, or interesting questions that pop up. The point is that you must analyze your notes *as* you do your research. Constant analysis will suggest themes to look for when researching, and will help you develop your argument. Do not wait to analyze your notes until you have finished taking them; it doesn't work like that.

**Prepare outline and develop hypothesis:** After analyzing your notes, prepare an outline of your paper. An outline is your tentative scheme for organizing and writing the paper. The main purpose of the outline is to determine the structure of your paper. Without an overall sense of how the component parts of your research will address your topic (and hence support your thesis), you will have a very difficult time writing your paper. Through preparation of an outline, you should begin to get a sense of the argument you want to make. This argument is your tentative thesis, or hypothesis. You should keep your hypothesis in mind at all times when writing; you should ask yourself if your material supports it, or if you need to modify it.

**Write first draft:** Once you have a good collection of notes (you needn't have finished all of your research) and an outline, you should write a first draft of your final paper. Arrange your notes according to your outline. Your paragraphs should correspond to your outline, and each should advance your goal of supporting your hypothesis. A first draft will challenge you to articulate ideas that have been floating around in your head. You will probably realize that what you thought were simple ideas are actually complex, and are more difficult to express than you expected. That is normal; most of us don't realize how smart we really are.

**Write final draft:** Evaluate and edit your first draft. This is a crucial step! After reconsidering your paper, write your final draft, revising your first draft and incorporating the extra research you have completed. Throughout the paper writing process, the most important (and challenging) task will be to constantly edit and revise your work.

## TAKING NOTES

Your research paper is based on your reading from different sources, so your notes must be sufficiently complete to be meaningful *after* the source has been read (or interviewed or heard or seen). Since you have to document (foot- or end-note) your paper, your notes must contain adequate resource information. Notecard method (using 3"x5" or 4"x6" index cards) is a convenient and flexible method of organizing your research. When you take notes, write only one note on each card. In addition to the note itself, write:

- a. in the upper left hand corner of the card, the appropriate category or topic/subtopic to which the note refers.
- b. in the upper right hand corner, the name of the source.
- c. the page number(s) of that part (or those parts) of the source that you have used in taking the note. If you have used more than one page, indicate your page numbers in such a way as that when you start to write your paper, you can tell from what page each part of your note comes, for you may not choose to include the whole note.

This separate card method will make organizing your information much easier. When you come to outline and to organize your paper, you will be able to sort your notes in any way you please--by subtopic for example--and to arrange them in any order you please. You may even find that you want to recategorize some of your notes. Such flexibility is impossible if you take notes in a notebook. You will also be able to footnote your paper without having to refer to the sources themselves again.

In taking the note itself, paraphrase or quote your source or do both; *but do only one at a time*. Paraphrases and quotations require special care. Anything between paraphrase and quotation is not acceptable: you either paraphrase or quote, but do nothing in between. To paraphrase a source (or part of a source) is to reproduce it in words and word orders substantially different from the original. When you paraphrase well, you keep the sense of the original but change the language, retaining some key words, of course, but otherwise using your own words and your own sentence patterns. As a rough guide, if you copy more than three words in a row from a source, these words should be in quotation marks.

To quote a source (or part of a source) is to reproduce it exactly. When you quote well, you keep both the sense and language of the original, retaining its punctuation, its capitalization, its type face (roman or italic), and its spelling (indeed, even its misspelling).

## WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY

A *working* bibliography should be started at the outset of your investigation. It has a few functions:

- a. it tells you if there are insufficient, adequate, or overabundant amounts of information on your topic.
- b. it gets you organized and points a direction for you to start researching. It helps you to get down to work.

If you compile your bibliography on index cards, you will have more flexibility in alphabetizing and adding and deleting sources. Your bibliography should always be undergoing change as your research progresses.

Keep a separate card for each source you consult. Be sure to include all of the relevant publication information for each of your sources. A few examples taken from Kate Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, (Chicago: Fifth Edition, 1987) follow. These are only the most common types of sources you will need to cite; you will surely need to consult Turabian or another style manual for others. Note that the way to cite a source in a bibliography is different than the way to cite a source in a footnote.

1. Book (footnote, bibliography):

<sup>1</sup>John Hope Franklin, George Washington Williams: A Biography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 54.

Franklin, John Hope. George Washington Williams: A Biography. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

2. Article in a scholarly journal (footnote, bibliography):

<sup>1</sup>Richard Jackson, "Running Down the Up-Escalator: Regional Inequality in Papua New Guinea," Australian Geographer 14 (May 1979): 180.

Jackson, Richard. "Running Down the Up-Escalator: Regional Inequality in Papua New Guinea." Australian Geographer 14 (May 1979): 174-85.

3. Article in a newspaper (footnote, bibliography):

<sup>1</sup>William Lloyd Garrison, "Guilt of New England," The Liberator (Boston), January 7, 1832.

Garrison, William Lloyd. "Guilt of New England." The Liberator (Boston), January 7, 1832.

*It is essential that you obtain complete and accurate bibliographical information on each source, whether it be primary or secondary, which you use. Consult Turabian, 175-228 for directions on information needed for different types of sources.*

## REVISING THE DRAFT

1. After you have written the first draft, you should revise it. You should not begin this revision immediately after you have finished the first draft. Let your paper sit for awhile and then come back to it with a fresh view. As the researcher and writer, you have been too close to your work. You

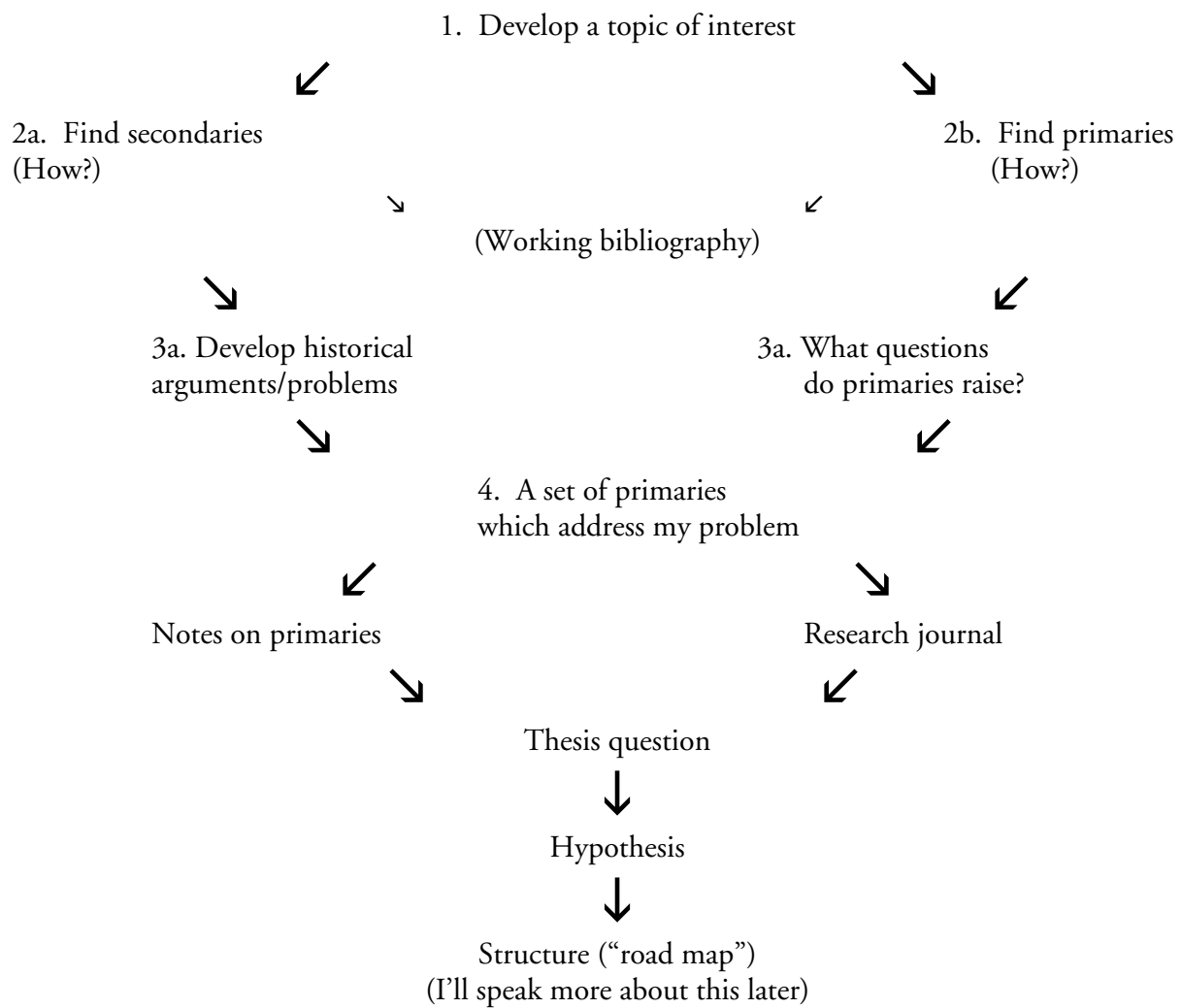
need a little distance before you look at the paper again. You might want to change some of the original organization, or delete parts which are tangential or insignificant to your main argument. You may also need to do some additional research and strengthen your arguments.

2. Think about how you have arranged the arguments in your paper. Does the paper's organization offer the most effective arrangement of your ideas and evidence to support the theme?
3. Reread the topic sentence for each paragraph. Does the sentence make your point and does the information in the paragraph support it?
4. Be sure that you have placed your topic in its historical context, preferably in the first few pages of the paper.
5. Locate your argument among those offered in the secondary historical works which you have read. At this point, you should have some idea of how your approach/theme adds to the body of historical literature on your topic. How have other historians treated the subject? What is different and/or unique about your approach/theme by comparison to the way previous historians have treated the topic? (Bear in mind that I realize that you have not completed an exhaustive analysis of all of the secondary works on your topic. In fact, you have probably only read a few articles and/or books. I just want you to locate your work in relation to the secondary material you have read.)
6. Think about your introduction and conclusion. Remember that these are crucial to the paper and you should take some time when writing them. The introduction not only interests the reader in getting beyond the first few pages but it also presents the focus of your argument. The conclusion is your chance to make a lasting impression on your audience; take advantage of it!
7. The final revision of your paper should include a check of overall organization, style and composition, spelling, proof of thesis, and format (arrangement of title page, pagination, endnotes if applicable, bibliography, citation form.)

# 1.a.

## The Research Process

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## Secondaries – articles

Stanley, Amy Dru. "Beggars Can't Be Choosers: Compulsion and Contract in Postbellum America." *Journal of American History* vol. 78, no. 4 (March 1992), 1265-93.

Bowdoin stacks – journals collection  
Keywords: labor theory

## Sample bibliography card:

- Every bit of information you'll need to cite the source later should be on the card.
- Use correct citation format.
- Make sure location is clear.
- Include keywords for your own reference.
- Employ other organization schemes as necessary

## Sample note card:

- Source must be crystal clear (if using abbreviated citation style)
- Include page # of original source
- Quote, or paraphrase, but only one at a time.
- Quote scrupulously.
- When paraphrasing, keep your thoughts distinct from those of your source.
- Add keywords and other organizational tools for your own benefit.
- Consider the possibilities of computers.

## LABOR THEORY

Stanley, "Compulsion and Contract in Postbellum America"

1272: "In the eyes of charity reformers, there was a clearly etched 'line of distinction' between laboring for wages and begging. The wage laborer was an independent person, self-supporting, one who participated in the vast social exchange of the marketplace and obeyed its rules – the polar opposite of the slave." Goes on to say that betters were not part of the market – didn't buy or sell their labor. Flouted rules of the marketplace. [I guess this is why, in an age of expanding market activity, they were despised – they made fragile capitalism seem vulnerable.]

Keywords: begging, labor theory, slavery (and labor theory)



# 4.c.

## Research Basics

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Places to start finding stuff:

- Library online catalog <<http://library.bowdoin.edu/>>
  - Start with a word search <<http://phebe.bowdoin.edu/search/w>>
- Maine Info Net <<http://130.111.64.9/>>
- Online journals:
  - Jstor <<http://library.bowdoin.edu/ejournals/ip/jstor.cgi>>
  - Project Muse <<http://library.bowdoin.edu/ejournals/ip/muse.cgi>>
  - Academic Search Premier <<http://web1.epnet.com/search.asp>>
- America: History and Life <<http://library.bowdoin.edu/erl/ip/america.cgi>>
- Library guide to American History <<http://library.bowdoin.edu/rguides/amerhist/>>
- Rael's guide to historical research at Bowdoin  
<<http://www.bowdoin.edu/%7Eprael/sources.htm>>
- WorldCat <<http://library.bowdoin.edu/erl/ip/worldcat.cgi>>
- Some useful reference sources <<http://www.bowdoin.edu/%7Eprael/encyclopedia.htm>>

Online guides for citing sources:

- Research and Documentation Online (online guide from Bedford/St. Martin's Press)  
<<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/hacker/resdoc/history/footnotes.htm>>
- A Brief Citation Guide for Internet Sources in History and the Humanities  
<<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/%7Eafrica/citation.html>>
- Online! from Bedford's/St. Martin's Press (for electronic sources only)  
<<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/index.html>>
- Citing Electronic Sources (from the Library of Congress)  
<<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/start/cite/index.html>>

Three books on writing every history student should own:

- Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Bedford Books/St. Martin's Press, 2001). <D13.R295 2001> Contains much concise, useful advice, including a guide to Chicago-style citations.

- Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). <LB2369.T8 1996> The standard source for college history writers.
- Diana Hacker, *Rules for Writers*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996). <PE1408 .H277 2000> A standard grammar, useful for identifying and correcting mistakes.

## 4.d.

### Keeping a Research Journal

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The function of a research journal is to set down on paper your thoughts about the primary and secondary source material you are reading. It is a record of your questions about the material and your tentative answers to those questions. It documents the connections you make between the materials you read, and provides a place to record the questions this material raises.

The object of the journal is to record your thoughts about the primary and secondary material at hand. You want to do this as close to the moment of having the thought as possible, and you want to minimize anything that hampers this objective. Make your journal accessible and easy to use. Use a special computer file devoted to the purpose, or a spiral-bound notebook, or whatever device works best for you. Don't worry about correct spelling or punctuation. The journal is not for anyone's eyes but your own.

The journal should document the ways you are thinking about the material and connecting it up with other things you've thought about. What surprises you about what you are reading? For example, one journal entry might merely be an expression of personal disgust that anyone had ever held slaves:

How could anyone have ever done this? How could they have ever considered it ok to hold HUMAN BEINGS as property? And the wierd thing is that some of these slaveholders look just like normal people -- they have families, they seem concerned about other humans elsewhere. How do I understand this!!!?

Such thoughts are extremely valuable. At first, they might seem like "non-academic" thoughts because they are personal feelings. But every historian relies upon such feelings at some level; they tell us what is important to consider. In this case, the thought above suggests a thesis question: "We tend to vilify slaveholders as inhuman monsters, yet in many ways they looked just like people we do not vilify. How did slaveholders reconcile the practice of slaveholding with their own humanity?"

The journal is not a place to take notes on your sources. A journal entry may begin with, contain references to, or discuss notes, but the notes themselves should be kept elsewhere. The function of the journal is to discuss your notes, not record them. Take your notes elsewhere; if you use the journal to take them, the journal will be of less value.

Before and while writing your paper draft, go back over the journal. How has your thinking evolved on specific issues? By keeping in mind the intellectual journey *you* have made through the material, you are reminded that your readers will be making a similar journey, through which you must guide them. Oftentimes, properly-edited journal entries may even form the basis of

paragraphs. Editing and expanding journal material may help you make the difficult transition from researching to writing.

Here is an example of one of my journal entries:

11/9/95: reading No Chariot Let Down intro (p. 11). speak of respectability demanded of free blacks in the south. check also black masters for this, as well as Berlin. idea of respectability common to free blacks North and South. free blacks of charleston, when faced with resentment of white workers who competed against them, fell back upon personal relationships with white elites. placed them among white aristocrats, because associating with slaves was dangerous. in North, blacks often Federalist, then Whig. (that Clay etching/cartoon demonstrates this.) piersen mentions it, too. black elites had closer ties to white elites than to white working class. this is the claim, anyway. difficult to test, especially at the lower level. was the boy in the clay etching representative of anything else? also, I can see former slaves maintaining their whig alliances with old masters, but what about the free elite who sought to distance themselves from associations with slavery? would this desire change things?

A few comments on this entry:

(1) I start with the date. This is the only kind of formatting rule I am concerned with, and I do it only because it helps me trace how I thought about an idea. Other than that, I am totally unconcerned with making the entry look good. I'm just thinking thoughts on paper.

(2) There are many references here that no one but me will understand. That's fine -- the important thing is that I will understand later what I was talking about. In the present case, I'm thinking about other sources that apply to my argument.

(3) In the entry, I'm making connections. I wrote the entry because I was reading a book about free blacks in antebellum Charleston, SC, and it triggered some thoughts about free blacks in the antebellum North. My entry thus makes connections between the kinds of material I've read. Ask yourself, how does what I'm reading bear on the work I'm doing?

(4) *The entry also raises questions that are left unanswered.* This is the most important thing I can stress about the journal. Good historical writing is the result of a process of asking questions and pondering answers (even if it *looks* like the historian had all the answers from the start). You simply cannot develop good papers without engaging in this process. The journal is a way to record these internal conversations, and use them to develop your paper.

You probably engage in this process anyway. Whenever you read, you ask yourself questions ("why are they representing slave speech like they are," or "what the heck was the Nullification Crisis, anyway?"). Most of us, however, don't respect our internal questions; we are taught that if we have to ask them we must be deficient, and we therefore ignore them. The journal process is about becoming comfortable with our own questioning. It is about respecting our internal (and external) discussions about what we read, and elevating our trained intuitions to the center around which we build our writing.

The point behind all of this is to develop interesting and worthwhile papers. Too many papers focus on simple, easy-to-answer, "fact"-based questions, such as "How did slaves escape their

masters?" These are valid questions, but they tend not to lead to interesting papers. Rather, they produce rather dry narratives or recitations of facts. In the above case, the paper might merely relate the different ways that different slaves escaped.

Such papers lack interest. Your paper is not primarily an opportunity to relate the "facts" about something; it should be a chance for you to explore interesting questions. These are the kinds of questions that don't have simple answers; they are the ones historians and other scholars deal with constantly. With such questions, you may not arrive at the "right" answer, because there is no right answer. Instead, your paper will focus on helping us understand how we might think about a particularly troublesome issue.

Students often shy away from considering such questions because they think they cannot "prove" their point. Yet it is precisely this ambiguity which makes the questions worth asking in the first place; if the answer was easy, it wouldn't be worth asking. In the above case, it is fine to start with the question, "how did slaves escape their masters?" but at some point the issue should get more complicated. For instance, what was *the meaning* of slave escape? Did it reflect a revolutionary challenge to the system? Or in some ways did it actually support the slave regime? What were the causes of escapes, and what do these causes have to do with the meaning of escape in a larger sense? The list of possible questions is nearly endless; *formulating and asking them is one of your first and most important task!*

This process of honing-in on a good thesis question can only take place when you listen to your own thoughts about the material you read. For instance, you might start with one of those straight-forward, "fact"-based questions, like "How did masters control their slaves?" In the process of finding out how, you look up slave narratives published in the North in the 1850s. And what you find there -- among many other things -- is tale after tale of female slaves being beaten savagely, often after being stripped of their clothing. You wonder about this, but don't really know what to make of it, so you move on, ignoring it in your search for "real" answers to your question.

You have just missed a golden opportunity. Instead of ignoring your thought, you might have pulled out your journal and jotted a quick note:

on reading solomon northups narrative: All this violence in the slave narrative -- it seems also lurid, so sexual. was this a kind of entertainment as well as antislavery propaganda? What's going on here??

The mere act of writing down this question gives credibility and substance to your thought. Once it is on paper, you may see it again later. Perhaps you will read a similar passage in another narrative, and something will click in your head. You are on your way to developing a fascinating thesis question: What is the role of violence and sexuality in the antebellum slave narrative?

# 5.a.

## Structuring Your Essay

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- INTRODUCTION
  - Introduce the problem
  - Define key terms
  - State the thesis
    - Stems from good question
    - Tentative answer is “hypothesis”
    - Refine hypothesis into thesis
    -
- THE BODY
  - How is the paper organized?
  - Paragraphs
    - Topic sentence (mini-thesis)
    - Argument supporting topic sentence
    - Transition to next mini-thesis
  - Arguing in paragraphs
    - Mini-thesis
    - Evidence
    - Analysis (what does evidence support?)
    -
- Conclusion
  - Re-state the thesis
  - Significance of thesis (why should we care about the problem?)

# 5.b.

## The Three Parts of a History Paper

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**I. THE INTRODUCTION:** The introduction is usually one paragraph, or perhaps two in a paper of eight pages or more. Its purpose is to: (1) set out the problem to be discussed; (2) define key terms that will be used in that discussion; (3) outline the structure of the argument; (4) **CLEARLY STATE THE THESIS.**

### A. Suggestions for the introduction:

**Establish the problem:** Quickly established the issue your paper confronts. Where and when are we? What are we examining? It is especially important to clearly define the limits of your exploration. If you are discussing the life of Frederick Douglass, it will not suffice to establish the setting by referring to the “days of slavery,” since slavery has existed in all times all over the world. Frederick Douglass was a slave in Maryland in the decades before the Civil War. Do not begin a history paper with absurdly general phrases like, “since the beginning of time,” or “humans have always. . . .” Get as specific as necessary as early as possible.

**Set the tone, voice, and style of your paper.** (See other guidelines for how this is done.) Make sure you convey that the topic is of vital concern, and that you are interested in it.

**Catch the reader's attention.** You might start with an example, a quotation, a statistic, or a complaint. Be sure that this opening theme runs through your paper. Do not abandon this theme. You can use it again later to help unify your paper.

**Provide a subtle blueprint (or “road map”) for the paper.** Let your reader know where you are headed (how you plan to tackle the subject) without giving away your best ideas. If, for instance, your paper breaks down into political, social, and cultural components, telegraph this to your reader so she will know what to expect.

### B. The thesis:

The last function of the introduction is to present your thesis. This is so important to your paper that it merits lengthy consideration -- please see my handout on this topic. The biggest problem with student papers is that they contain no true thesis. The second biggest problem with student papers is that the thesis is vague and ill-defined.

**How the thesis fits in the introductory paragraph:** The thesis statement is the one-sentence version of your argument. The thesis thus presents your reader with new information. But a good thesis will require you to introduce the concepts in it before presenting the thesis itself. That is the task of the introductory paragraph. The following introductory paragraph presents a thesis that relies on concepts which have not been properly defined and clarified:

Since the beginning of time humans have owned one another in slavery. This brutal institution was carried to its fullest extent in the United States in the years between the American Revolution and the Civil War. Slaveholders treated their slaves as chattel, brutalizing them with the whip and the lash. The law never recognized the humanity of the slave, and similarly regarded him as property. Consequently, there was a big disparity between private and public rights of slaves.

This thesis presents two words — “private” and “public” rights -- that are not even mentioned earlier in the paragraph. What are these things? This paragraph does nothing to establish the distinction. Instead, it is a bland statement of theme which provides little background for the thesis. Thus, when we do read the thesis, it seems to float — the premises underlying it have not been established. Compare the last introductory paragraph with this one:

To many supporters of slavery, the nature of slave rights had a dual character. On the one hand, in order to maintain the total dominance of the white master class, the law denied any rights to slaves. Publicly, the slave was merely property, and not human at all. Yet the personal records of many planters suggest that slaves often proved able to demand customary “rights” from their masters. In the privacy of the master-slave relationship, the black man did indeed have rights which the white man was bound to respect, on pain of losing his labor or subjecting himself to violence. This conflict between slaves’ lack of “public” rights and masters’ “private” acknowledgment of slaves’ rights undermined planters’ hegemony and permitted slaves to exert a degree of autonomy and freedom within an oppressive institution.

Note how quickly this paragraph lays the groundwork for the thesis. It is clearly structured around two competing concepts — public and private rights — which are then incorporated into the thesis. Nearly every element of the thesis is established in the preceding paragraph, yet the thesis itself is not a restatement of the paragraph. This paragraph even tells the reader what sources will be consulted: planters’ personal records. Note finally that, in contrast to the previous paragraph, the reader now has a strong sense of what the paper will need to argue to prove its thesis.



**II. THE BODY:** This takes up several pages, and constitutes the bulk of your paper. Here is where you argue your thesis. The content of this section largely will depend on your thesis, and what it requires you to argue. Think to yourself, "what do I need to support this argument?" If you find yourself unable to answer, you may need a more interesting thesis.

**A. Structure of the body:** You need an organizing scheme for your paper, which most often will be suggested by your thesis. Let's take this thesis: "In the 1950s, American auto workers developed their identities as laborers in the home as well as the workplace." This thesis suggests a structure: at the very least, you will have to divide things up into "home" and "workplace."

**B. Logic and flow:** The general movement in the body is from the general to the specific. Start with general statements, such as "Federal policy towards native peoples aimed at either assimilating Indians or exterminating them." Then move on to specific statements which support your general statement, such as "The origins of the policy of assimilation can be traced back to Puritan missionaries of the 1650s."

**C. Paragraphs:** Your paper is built on paragraphs. Each paragraph should be minimum of four (sometimes three) sentences. The first sentence of each paragraph is called the "topic sentence."

**D. Topic sentences:** The topic sentence should tell the reader what the paragraph will be about. In essence, it is a "mini-thesis" -- a small argument you will support in the paragraph. The rest of the paragraph will be support for this mini-argument. For example, the topic sentence for a paragraph may be the general statement:

*Federal policy towards native peoples aimed at either assimilating Indians or exterminating them.*  
(Note that you are including no specific facts in this sentence, you are merely making an argument which must be supported with facts and evidence.)

**E. Support:** Two kinds of support should appear in your paragraphs:

Source evidence and quotations: Taken from primary (sometimes secondary) sources. Can be quoted material, but not always -- you can always paraphrase (put in your own words) this material, as long as you acknowledge the source. This is the "raw data" that supports the mini-thesis of your paragraph. In the case above (federal policy towards Indians), you could, for instance, quote portions of this letter from Thomas Jefferson, in which he advocates to the Mohicans private ownership of land to Indians as a means of assimilating them:

When once you have property, you will want laws and magistrates to protect your property and persons, and to punish those among you who commit crimes. You will find that our laws are good for this purpose; you will wish to live under them, you will unite yourselves with us, join in

our Great Councils and form one people with us, and we shall be Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Analysis: Raw data *can never, ever* stand alone to support your mini-thesis. It must *always* be interpreted and analyzed. This is especially true of quotes. *Never* just plop a quote in and expect it to be clear to the reader how it supports the mini-thesis. Following each citation of raw data, you *must* analyze and interpret it -- tell me how it supports the point. In the case above, *you* must supply the connection between the primary source evidence (the quotation above) and your "mini-thesis" (that assimilation was one of the goals of federal policy):

*Jefferson had little interest in understanding Native American culture and society on its own terms. To him, "assimilation" meant encompassing natives in a web of obligations and institutional arrangements which utterly departed from the anarchy he alleged characterized their societies, and rendered them dependent upon the "civilized" society he represented.* (Note that these are my thoughts, my words, and my analysis of the material. I am not permitting the material to speak for itself, because it cannot.)

**F. Transitions:** The body of the paper must flow from one idea to the next. This linking of ideas is accomplished through transitional phrases. There are transitions between paragraphs, and transitions within paragraphs. Often, but not always, the last sentence of a paragraph begins to guide the reader to the next idea. (For this reason, it is often a good idea to end paragraphs with a sentence summing-up their findings.) Or the topic sentence of the next paragraph may accomplish this. In the current example, this topic sentence for the next paragraph not only introduces a new mini-thesis, it serves as a transition from the preceding paragraph:

*If Jefferson embodied a policy of assimilation, President Andrew Jackson represented the ambivalence of a nation enamored with both assimilation and extermination of Native Americans.* (The key to the transition is the phrase "If Jefferson embodied a policy of assimilation." This phrase bridges the last paragraph by summarizing its findings. As you can tell, the paragraph(s) must deal with the ways Jackson represented the embodiment of both policies towards Native Americans.)

Here is another example of a clear transition:

*. . . Sailors in the merchant marine faced a troublesome labor picture. Seasonal fluctuations and the unpredictability of the economy of the shipping industry contributed to instability in employment relations. These in turn led to a decline in workers's loyalty and their sense of job stability.*

*Instability and insecurity also characterized the wage and employment conditions of longshore work. . . .* (The transition here is built on the use of "also" in this topic sentence, which links the "instability and insecurity" of the longshoremen in this paragraph with the "instability and insecurity" of the sailors in the previous paragraph.)

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<sup>1</sup>Jefferson to Delawares, Mohicans, and Munries, December 21, 1808, in Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh, eds., *Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, DC, 1904), vol. 16, p. 452.

**G. Arguing in the body:** The body is where you will flex your rhetorical muscle. Scholarly argument is not necessarily rancorous; it does not rely upon heated emotions, raised voices, and passionate appeals to the heart. Rather, scholarly arguments marshal *facts* -- and *analyze* those facts -- in a fashion intended to persuade the reader through *reason* rather than emotion. The most important technique for doing this is to anticipate the counter-arguments your argument is likely to receive. You must constantly ask yourself, what arguments which counter my thesis make sense? You may do this one of two ways:

(1) you may *refute* an anticipated counter-argument by proving that it is untrue (sort of a preemptive strike), as in, *"While the federal census of 1890 seems to suggest an increase in black mortality, that census was infamous for recording specious data."*

(2) you may *concede* certain points: accept the truth of statements which seem to refute your argument, but explain why they actually do not harm your argument (sort of a strategic retreat), as in *"It was indeed true that Latino youth were incarcerated at a rate three to four times greater than Anglo youth, yet this may suggest the iniquitous workings of the local justice system rather than a Latino propensity towards crime."*

In history, these strategies often mean dealing with evidence that seems to undermine the point you are trying to make. It is crucial that you not ignore this evidence; after all, the reader will not. Selectively invoking evidence while ignoring counter-arguments undermines your credibility, and hence the force of your argument. Consider the following paragraph:

*White Southerners were concerned only with re-imposing a kind of slavery on the freedpeople. They voted the straight Democratic ticket, which sought to overturn "Negro rule," and they supported secret organizations like the Klan and the Knights of the White Camellia. In short, their regard for the civil rights of the newly-freed slaves was almost non-existent.* (The fallacy here is one of over-generalization. The author claims that *all* southern whites supported the move to return freedpeople to a kind of slavery. But we know that some southern whites *did* support black rights in the era, and voted Republican. By refusing to consider countervailing evidence, the author undermines what is a generally sound point: most southern whites supported the Democracy, but not all. By anticipating and countering these criticisms, this author would enhance her credibility and make a good argument more persuasive.)

**III. CONCLUSION:** This is usually one paragraph long, and briefly recapitulates your thesis, pulling all your arguments together. The first sentence of the concluding paragraph is a clear, specific re-statement of thesis. The conclusion should do more than simply re-state the argument. It also suggests why the argument is important in the bigger scheme of things, or suggests avenues for further research, or raises a bigger question.

# 5.c.

## The Thesis

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### I. WHAT IS A THESIS?

**What is a thesis?** The thesis is the controlling idea around which you construct the rest of your paper. In a history paper, *the thesis generally explains why or how something happened*. Every word of your paper should support your thesis. Information you do not directly relate to your thesis will appear irrelevant. This means, of course, that in a paper with a weak or no thesis, much of the paper will appear to be irrelevant and unguided.

**How do I present the thesis?** The thesis should be contained in a single sentence that is concise and grammatically correct. This is usually the last sentence of the first paragraph. More than one sentence may be necessary to establish the thesis. The remainder of the introductory paragraph should draw the reader's attention to the problem the thesis confronts, and define key terms that appear in the thesis.

**What about theses in essay exams?** In an essay exam, the thesis is the one-sentence answer to the question posed; the remainder of the paper will prove the thesis.

**The thesis is a scholarly argument.** Most writing attempts to convince the reader of something. Even a poetic description of a rock is an attempt to convince the reader that the rock appears a certain way. A history paper takes a stand on a historical issue or problem, and attempts to develop a coherent and persuasive line of thought intended to convince the reader of the validity of that stand. Your thesis is the concise statement of your argument.

### II. THE THESIS QUESTION

**A good thesis derives from a good question.** Since the thesis is your conclusion to a scholarly argument, there must be a clear question at stake. A thesis which does not answer a question, or answers a simple or obvious question, is not a thesis. You need to ask thoughtful questions of your topic and primary source material to develop a good thesis. The best theses are good precisely because the questions they answer are significant, complex, and original.

**What does a good thesis question look like?** There are many sources for questions which lead to good thesis, but all seem to pose a novel approach to their subject. A good thesis question may result from your curious observations of primary source material, as in "During World War II, why did American soldiers seem to treat Japanese prisoners-of-war more brutally than German prisoners-of-war?" Or, good thesis questions may challenge accepted wisdom, as in "Many people assume that Jackson's Indian policy had nothing to do with his domestic politics; are they right?" Finally, a good thesis question may complicate a seemingly clear-cut topic, as in "Puritans expropriated Indians' land for wealth, but were psychological factors involved as well?"

### III. CONSTRUCTING A THESIS

**How do I develop a good thesis?** Here is an example of how you might arrive at a strong thesis.

(1) Start with a topic, such as discrimination against Japanese Americans during World War II. (Note that this is a very general area of interest. At this stage, it is utterly unguided. You cannot write a paper on this topic, because you have no path into the material.)

(2) Develop a question around it, as in "why did government officials allow discrimination against Japanese Americans?" (You now have a question that helps you probe your topic; your efforts have a direction, which is answering the question you have posed for yourself. Note that there are a great many questions which you might ask of your general topic. You should expect in the course of your research to consider many such possibilities. Which ones are the most interesting? Which ones are possible given the constraints of the assignment?)

(3) Develop a unique perspective on your question which answers it: Government officials allowed discrimination against Japanese Americans not because it was in the nation's interest, but because it provided a concrete enemy for people to focus on. (This is a thesis statement. You have answered the question you posed, and done so with a rather concrete and specific statement. Your answer offers a novel and thoughtful way of thinking about the material. Once the terms of the thesis are clarified [what was the "national interest"; what was the meaning and value of having "a concrete enemy for people to focus on"?], you are on your way to a solid paper.)

**Constructing a tentative thesis (hypothesis):** Here is a somewhat formulaic approach to constructing a tentative thesis. It is just one possibility among many.

(1) A concessive clause ("although such and such"). If you do not concede something, you will appear strident and unreasonable. By conceding something, your point will stand out, for you will have contrasted it with an opposing position.

(2) The main clause. This is the heart of your argument -- the thing you will prove. The subject of the main clause should be the subject of the paper. Do not present it in the form of "I will show" or "I hope to prove."

(3) A "because" clause. This will force you to summarize support for your thesis as concisely as possible.

Example: Although the Scopes Trial was a legal farce, it reflected deep ambivalence in American thinking, because so many conflicting attitudes met headlong in Dayton, Tennessee. (Not a great thesis, but a good start. What were those conflicting attitudes? What was the key to their conflict? This thesis should be re-visited later with these questions in mind.)

**Another approach to thesis construction:** Here is another exercise that might help you develop your thesis. On a separate sheet of paper, complete the following sentences:

(1) Dear Reader: I want to convince you that. . . . [This is a hypothesis]

(2) The main reasons why you should believe me are that. . . . [This is a summary of your evidence and logic.]

(3) You should care about my thesis because. . . . [This provides the seeds of your conclusion, and checks the significance of your thesis.]

**Refining the thesis:** A good thesis does not spring to life from nothing. A good thesis is the product of a discussion you have about your source material and its meaning. Here is what that process might look like:

(1) Start with a question about your source material, as explained above.

*How did African-American women fare after slavery ended?*

(2) Create a hypothesis, that is, a tentative answer to the question. I suggest using the formula above.

*Although freedom made life better in general for the slaves, African-American women fared worse than African-American men under freedom, because society sought to impose sexist notions of gender roles on emancipated black families.*

(3) Then, considering the contents of your primary sources, ask these questions: Is my hypothesis really true? What evidence at my disposal makes it false? How can I *modify* my hypothesis to make it true?

For instance, you may have some source information that suggests black women were beaten by their husbands when free, but you might also have some that suggests their husbands protected them from whites and kept them from working long hard hours in the fields. Perhaps it was only in the realm of *relative equality within the family* that women lost out in freedom.

(4) Develop a new, more complex hypothesis by modifying the old one. There usually is no need to start from scratch; simply alter what you started with.

*Although freedom made life better in general for African-American women, freedwomen may have lost some of the power they had held in the family under slavery, because freedom subjected them to the patriarchal domination of a sexist society.*

### More suggestions for developing a good thesis:

Developing a good thesis is usually the most difficult part of writing a paper; do not expect it to come easily.

After developing a hypothesis, read through it again, searching for vague words and phrases that "let you off the hook," or permit you to not make strong arguments. Underline such phrases, and re-word them to be more specific. In every un-refined thesis, there is a word or phrase which remains unclear or unexplained. Find it and "unpack" it in your introductory paragraph.

You should start thinking about possible theses from the very start of your paper preparation, but *you need to examine your primary sources before you can develop a strong thesis*. It is impossible to develop a good thesis without already having begun to analyze the primary sources which supply your evidence. How can you know what is even possible to argue if you haven't looked closely at your data?

In a history paper, you must state your conclusion (thesis) at the outset. But this does not mean you have to *write* it that way. Often, you will not know exactly how you will make that complex thesis until you have gotten deeply into the material. Start your draft with a tentative thesis paragraph (perhaps constructed using the formula above). Once you have written a draft of the paper, go back and re-write the thesis paragraph -- you'll have a much better sense of what you just argued, and you'll come up with a better thesis. Then go back over the body and see if it supports this complex thesis. Good writing is a process of continually evaluating your work this way -- of constantly asking yourself if your evidence and analysis supports your thesis. Remember, the thesis is not the starting point of your exploration, but the result of it.

## IV. PRESENTING THE THESIS

**The thesis paragraph** (See also the handout entitled “The Three Parts of a History Paper.”): The first paragraph of your paper should be your thesis paragraph. The function of this paragraph is to define the problem your paper addresses, define key words and concepts you will use, and present your argument in summary. A thesis paragraph is not an opportunity to meditate on the history of the world; you do not have enough space in a thesis paragraph to do anything more than fulfill the purposes stated above. The last sentence of this paragraph should be your thesis. Here is an exercise which may help you develop your thesis paragraph. Answer the following questions:

What is the thing that happened? Succinctly introduce the event which frames your paper.

*Starting in the 1890s, the legislatures of the southern states began to pass a series of laws which by intent and in practice removed African Americans from the voting population. Despite the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, which guaranteed black men’s right to vote, African Americans found themselves steadily disfranchised through legal chicaneries like grandfather clauses, literacy tests, and all-white primaries.*

Why should we be interested in the thing that happened? Explain the significance of exploring this topic. What problems will you help us solve? What insights does your exploration promise?

*Historians have long wondered why this new spate of legislation appeared so long after the failure of the Republican Party in 1877. If Reconstruction ended black Americans’ dreams of meaningful political equality, why did southern whites delay for over a decade their efforts to disfranchise blacks? Perhaps the new measures signaled not the continuation of old forms of racial control, but the rise of a new, more hostile form of racial thought among white Southerners.*

How and/or why did it happen? This is the thesis.

*Legal disfranchisement did not begin until twelve years after the end of Reconstruction, for it took an economic downturn in the South and the coming of age of the first generation of southern African Americans born into freedom to trigger legal efforts to keep blacks away from the polls.*

These sentences, when placed together, could constitute a thesis paragraph. Notice three things about this paragraph:

- (1) The thesis, while it effectively encapsulates the argument, can not stand alone. It requires the sentences which precede it to “set it up.”
- (2) These sentences not only perform the functions described in the questions, they introduce and explain key dates and terms (disfranchisement, Reconstruction, economic crisis, 1890s, etc.)
- (3) The paragraph presents an entire argument in brief. It therefore lays out a structure for the paper. The author of this paper knows what needs to be established in the body of the



paper (and hence, has an outline), and the reader has a “road map” for following the argument.

This road map may be:

Establish that southern states started passing new disfranchisement laws in the 1890s. Historical examples would be nice.

Introduce the historical dilemma: why the gap between the end of Reconstruction and the start of disfranchisement. A brief summary of the historical debate would help here.

Introduce and develop the idea that disfranchisement resulted from new forms of racial thought rather than grew out of old ones. Examples demonstrating the ways disfranchisement reflected new ideas are required here. Comparing new and old ideas of race seems called for.

Discuss how economic downturn helped create a new situation in which new racial ideas could emerge. This is the first part of your thesis. It will require evidence of an economic downturn, and relate that downturn to new ideas of race.

Discuss how the coming of age of the first generation of southern African Americans born into freedom helped create a new situation in which new racial ideas could emerge. This is the second part of your thesis. It will require evidence of this new generation, and demonstrate how whites reacted to this development with new ideas of race.

Finally, you will have to link the new ideas of race to the rise of disfranchisement laws. You may be able to do this within the last two sections of the argument; if not, it will be necessary here.

**Why is the thesis placed in the introduction?** In a mystery novel, the puzzle is not solved until the end. But in history papers, your conclusion should appear first. Readers need to know what you are arguing from the beginning, so they can evaluate your argument as they read. This means that often you cannot write a good thesis statement before you have undertaken the arduous work of understanding your sources and argument. I cannot stress this enough: once you have written a draft of your paper, go back and refine your thesis statement.

**What does a bad thesis look like?** Here are some examples.

The evolution trial of 1925 was made a farce and a comedy by the circumstances surrounding the trial. Behind this facade lay issues that were deeply disturbing to the Americans of the 1920s. By an examination of the Scopes Trial, some of these issues can begin to be perceived and analyzed and perhaps they can reveal a better understanding of the decade. (There is no thesis

here. The last sentence seems to be a thesis, but actually speaks to the *way* the paper will proceed rather than to its conclusion. It does not explain why or how something happened.)

Henry David Thoreau, the author of Walden, and Theodore Parker, the unitarian minister and abolitionist, were two of the greatest minds of the antebellum period. The purpose of this paper is to examine means of resistance through a comparison of the philosophies of Thoreau and Parker. (This is a statement of purpose and method, but does not begin to offer a thesis. What is the question or problem? Comparison is a method of inquiry that leads to a thesis, not a thesis itself.)

As slaves, African Americans were given little or no rights as families. Husbands and wives were parted, and children were separated from their mothers by masters who had no qualms about selling them. Even those families kept intact were by no means protected from the hardships of slavery. Through emancipation came new opportunities and problems for African American families. (This is a little closer, but still problematic. It does assert something [emancipation brought "new opportunities and problems"] about its subject [African American families]. Yet this assertion is vague; it lacks focus and direction. More questions need to be asked: What *kind* of opportunities and problems did emancipation present? Which [opportunities or problems] were more important to the shaping of post-emancipation life? In short, the assertion made here is neither sufficiently adventurous nor specific to qualify as a good thesis.)

# 5.d.

## History and Rhetoric

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RHETORIC: The art of discourse; skill in the use of language.

DISCOURSE: Continuous expression or exchange of ideas; formal and connected expression of thought.

Rhetoric is the art of argument. How does rhetoric operate in history papers? Here are some principles:

- Good historical writing is always argumentative. Many historical narratives of Civil War battles published in popular magazines often do little more than relate the facts of a given action. As fascinating as such narratives may be, they neglect the basic enterprise of scholarship, for they fail to participate in discussion and debate. Instead, they merely relate (albeit perhaps with interest and verve) what they see to be a given set of facts.
- Good historical writing is always interpretive. While historians strive to approach their subjects with objectivity, they do not strive to be without concern for a topic. The principles of truth-finding demand that we not allow our concerns to influence the conclusions we derive from our investigations. But that does not forbid us from having concerns in the first place. Such concerns provide the energy for scholarly investigation, and mean that *any* scholarship, no matter how “objective” it purports to be, will reflect a set of underlying concerns. Many scholars thus believe that there is no such thing as “Just the facts, ma’am.”
- Good historical writing is always about creating something new. There is little point in re-hashing the work of other scholars. Historians constantly seek to add to the body of knowledge, even if in only some small way. Their enterprise is about asking questions which demand answers which have not been offered before. Sometimes they ask old questions and find new answers, or they may ask questions which never have been asked.
- Good historical writing almost always responds to debates in the field. Sometimes, this happens explicitly, as when a historian clearly challenges the interpretations of other historians. At other times, a historian’s dialogue with others in the field is far less evident. In every case, though, good history is written with historical debates in mind.

Understanding the ways historians construct their arguments is essential to writing good history papers. Students often find it difficult to determine what their papers are really about, not because they don’t know what their subject is, but because they don’t know what their argument is trying to *do*. Draw examples from other scholars: when reading secondary sources, constantly ask yourself, what does this article or chapter *do* with respect to the existing scholarship on this topic?

Here are some rhetorical strategies for approaching *your* project. They are common to many historical arguments. All address the question of what your paper will *do*. Once you know what you want your paper to *do* (with respect to the existing scholarship), you will have a much clearer sense of what *you* have to do; you will know how you will conduct your research and write up the results.

- No one has even begun to address this issue, and I will begin the process by developing the first interpretation of it.
- There are gaps or deficiencies in the scholarship on this topic, and I will (help) close them.
- There is a “traditional,” popular, or commonplace interpretation of this issue that I wish to debunk; I will offer a more accurate interpretation in its place.
- The existing interpretation of this topic is far too simple. I will add complexity to it by examining details.
- There is a debate on this topic, and my work will demonstrate that one side is right and the other wrong.
- There is a debate on this topic, and my work will demonstrate that the debate must be recast, because those participating in it are asking the wrong questions, or viewing the issue in an inappropriate way.
- Scholars have set forth a general historical argument or principle about this topic. I will use a “case study” approach (a detailed study of one “case”) to see what it says about the general principle. My results may reinforce the general principle, negate it entirely, or require its modification.
- Scholars have set forth a broad interpretation of a large and complex topic. I will use a “test case” approach (a detailed study of one portion of the larger argument) to see what it says about the broad interpretation. My results may reinforce the broad interpretation, negate it entirely, or require its modification.

Note: These are general categories, and the lines between them often are fuzzy. Most often, historical arguments combine two or more of these elements. Finally, this list is limited. What other rhetorical approaches are possible?

# 6.a.

## Grammar for Historians

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Here are some common grammatical problems that arise in history papers, listed with the correction mark for each, and the solution to the problem.

Mixed verb tenses ("tense"):

"Bernal Diaz presented a positive view of the Spanish because he wants to protect himself from recrimination." (Put "wants" in the same tense (preterit): "wanted.")

Passive voice ("passive"):

"The Aztecs were destroyed in droves, and finally defeated." (Identify the proper subject of this sentence and re-work, as in "The Spanish destroyed the Aztecs and droves, and finally defeated them.")

Run-on sentence ("run-on"):

"Coffee contains caffeine furthermore, chocolate, tea, and cola also contain significant amounts of caffeine." (Add a semi-colon after "caffeine" to properly conjoin two independent clauses.)

Comma splice ("splice"):

"Many industrialists thought workers lazy, as a result they paid their employees poorly." (Replace comma after "lazy" with a semi-colon to properly conjoin two independent clauses.)

Sentence fragment ("frag"):

"The little town of Dayton, Tennessee, in the tumultuous 1920s, caught in the international limelight." (The sentence needs a verb for its subject, Dayton.)

Faulty pronoun reference ("ref"):

"The Spaniard hated the Aztec because of their religious beliefs." (The referent for "their" ("Aztec") is singular; change "their" to "his.")

Subject-verb agreement ("s-v"):

"The army required each one of the soldiers to carry their own entrenching tool." ("Their" is plural, yet refers to the singular "one," not "soldiers." "The army required each soldier to carry his own entrenching tool.")

Faulty predication ("pred"):

"The belief in Manifest Destiny cannot conceive of Indians having rights." ("Conceiving" is a verb that "belief" is incapable of carrying out. Identify proper subject for the verb: "People who believe in Manifest Destiny cannot conceive. . . .")

Misplaced modifier ("mod"):

"The slaves burned the farmhouse, furious at their masters." (The participial phrase "furious at their masters" cannot modify "farmhouse"; it must be placed immediately after "slaves.")

Dangling modifier ("mod"):

"Arriving by boat in the New World, the weather was brutal." (The weather cannot arrive by boat in the New World; identify the proper subject for the first clause, as in "Arriving by boat in the New World, the Puritans found the weather brutal.")

Faulty parallel structure ("parallel"):

"Ways of preventing blacks from voting included the Grandfather Clause and holding all-white primaries." (A noun, "Grandfather Clause," is listed in series with a verb, "holding." Re-work so both are the same, as in ". . . included the Grandfather Clause and the all-white primary.")

Colloquial ("colloq"):

"Some critics try to straddle the fence between standard and revisionist interpretations of history." (Substitute non-colloquial phrase for "straddle the fence," as in "Some critics endorse elements of both standard and revisions interpretations of history.")

Word choice ("w.c."):

"One slave tells of how he was able to get a job after the war and earn enough money to travel to North Carolina to find his long separated mother." (His mother had probably remained in one piece; substitute "lost" for "separated.")

## OTHER CORRECTION COMMENTS YOU MAY SEE

source?           What is your source for saying this? Add a citation telling your readers where this came from.

evidence?        What is the evidence that supports this argument? You need to incorporate primary or secondary source evidence.

# 6.b.

## Formatting Your Paper

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**Title page:** Your paper should have a title page, on which appears the title of the paper, your name, my name, the course number, and the date.

**Bibliography:** Your paper should end with a bibliography, which is started on a new page, and labeled "Bibliography" at top. (The first page of the bibliography generally is left un-numbered.) Bibliographic citations should conform to the style outlined in the handout entitled "Working with Sources" and in Turabian. The bibliography includes all works consulted, not merely those works cited in your paper. Entries in a bibliography are begun with a "back tab."

**Line spacing:** The text of your paper should be double-spaced. You will not be using "block" quotations, so you need not worry about how to space these (they are double-spaced as well). The footnotes or endnotes should be single-spaced. Often, footnotes are prepared in ten-point type.

**Margins:** Use one-inch margins for the sides, top, and bottom of your paper.

**Typeface:** For the typeface, use a simple font, like TimesRoman, or Courier. Use a twelve-point font size. Clarity and ease of reading are the goals; avoid fancy but difficult-to-read fonts.

**A note on page length:** If you lack room, simply allow the paper to exceed the length requirements rather than expanding margins, reducing typefaces, etc. On the other hand, if the paper is too short, avoid tricks like increasing the point size of the typeface, or increasing the margins.

**Page numbers:** Each page should be numbered. On the first page, the page number goes on the bottom-center of the page. On subsequent pages, page numbers are placed on the upper-right corner of the page. For the first page of the bibliography and the first page of the endnote page, the page number is placed on the bottom center of the page, or omitted.

**Extra formats:** Some word processing programs permit special formatting options. Widow/orphan protection, block protection, and other options can be great aids. Take advantage of such capabilities according to your judgement, but keep in mind the overall objective of presenting your work clearly and simply. A small header or footer with your name in it is a good idea.

Computerized spelling and grammar checkers: These are wonderful advances in computer technology, but do not rely on them too much. Especially when using your spell checker, beware of homonyms. You are expected to edit and correct your paper yourself.



## A Style Sheet for History Writers

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Contractions: Standard English does not permit words like "don't."

"Its" and "it's": "It's" is a contraction for "it is," and should not appear in a history paper. "Its" is the possessive form of "it," as in "The corporation gave its assent to proceed."

"However" is tremendously over-used. Avoid it if possible. It is only properly used to contrast one point with another. It seldom belongs at the beginning of a sentence.

If you must use a word like "however," "for example," or "nevertheless," place it in the middle of the sentence, and use a comma both before and after the word.

"Hopefully" is another heavily mis-used term. It does not mean "it is hoped"; it is an adverb which modifies a verb or adjective. "Hopefully, the truck will make it on time" is incorrect. "Hopefully, I await the truck's arrival" is correct. "Hopefully" should rarely if ever appear in your papers.

Students often use "therefore" to demonstrate a logical connection between two points. If the connection is clear, "therefore" is unnecessary; if it is not clear, "therefore" will not make it so. The same also applies with "thus."

To "beg" the question does not mean to raise it, or demand that it be asked, current improper usage notwithstanding. Begging the question is a form of logical fallacy, wherein a conclusion is assumed without proof. How do we know Darwin's theory of genesis was wrong and the Bible's is right? Because God created the world in seven days.

Avoid splitting infinitives and compound verbs, as in "The general ordered them to frequently march" ("to march frequently"). Also applies to compound verbs: "has often wondered" becomes "has wondered often."

Lead and led: Lead is only present tense. Led is the only correct past tense.

The word "unique" does not take modifiers. Either something is one or a kind, or it is NOT! You can not be more or less unique than someone else.

"Very" is overused. Many words cannot be qualified, so "very" is inappropriate ("very unique" is an error; something cannot be only somewhat unique.) A better word exists; it is your job to find it. As in: very tired (exhausted), very happy (elated), very unhappy (miserable).

Learn the difference between "fewer" and "less." Fewer refers to numbers, less to amounts, degree, or value. Try and convince your local grocers that their signs should read "ten items or fewer!"

The present tense of "lay" and "lie" are different words. You lay something down. You lie yourself down.

Things can only be different from one another, NOT different than each other.

Use "between" with two items or people and "among" with three or more.

A comma separates phrases; a semi-colon separates two otherwise complete sentences. A colon is used only for a list of items and illustrative quotations.

When referring back to a person, use "who," not "that." "Mary, who wanted to buy a new dress, went shopping." "People who shower, do not smell." Not, "people that shower, do not smell."

Be careful about noun-verb agreement. If the subject is plural, the other references, the adjectives, the verb must be in plural form. Students prepare themselves, not himself or herself.

Be aware of incorrect capitalizations--some writers capitalize unnecessarily, others do not capitalize when it is necessary. If in doubt, look it up in a dictionary or style manual.

If you need to hyphenate a word, be sure to divide it at a syllable break.

Use exclamation marks and italics only for emphasis, and then, very sparingly.

Do not abbreviate the names of states or the United States. Never end sentences with abbreviations.

Never use "etc." and "and so forth." These terms are vague.

Never use a slash ("/") to separate words. Instead of "Britain clearly dominated in terms of military/economic might," use "Britain clearly dominated in terms of military and economic might."

Numbers: Spell out numbers which are less than three digits. If you use numbers, use Arabic numbers consistently.

Centuries: Spell out centuries, and do not capitalize them. Hyphenate centuries only when they are adjectives:

twentieth-century technology

the twentieth century  
the mid-nineteenth century

Black people may be termed “African Americans.” Note that this is not hyphenated unless used as an adjective, as in “African-American culture.” “Black” may be capitalized, but I prefer that “white” not be (there is debate over these matters). In all cases, be consistent with capitalization. “Negro” is also capitalized. Like “colored,” it is considered outdated and sometimes offensive; use these terms only in meaningful historical context and never as generic terms of reference. “Afro-American” may also be used, though its popularity has declined in recent years. To call someone “a black” is to objectify that person on the basis of skin color; I prefer “black person,” which retains skin color as an adjective rather than a noun.

“Prejudice” is a noun, not an adjective. “Prejudiced” is the adjective. The following sentence is therefore incorrect: “Southern whites lynched blacks because they were prejudice.”

Decades:

When referring to decades, there is no need for apostrophes between the date and the “s” which makes the decade plural. (There is no need, because in this case the apostrophe denotes neither possession nor a contraction. *The 1940's saw massive use of bombers in warfare* might just as easily be: *The 1940s saw massive use of bombers in warfare*.)

Apostrophes are used in dates under only two conditions:

- Before the date, they denote that you have omitted the first two digits of the date, as in: *Inflation and the legacy of Watergate hovered over the decade of the '70s.*
- To denote possession: *1997's worst political scandal centered around the Democrats alleged improprieties in campaign fund-raising.*

References to decades may be made using Arabic numbers (“the 1940s”) or spelled out (“the forties”) depending on the context:

- The 1940s saw massive use of bombers in warfare.
- During the ‘forties, grain prices plummeted.

Possessives:

Singular noun: President Chamberlain’s Bowdoin.

Singular noun ending in “s”: President Sills’s Bowdoin.

Plural noun: The women’s salaries.

Plural noun ending in “s”: The deans’ luncheon.

Special case of singular noun ending in “s”: Moses’ laws; Jesus’ parables. [religious figures only]

Note that only in the last two cases does the apostrophe appear without a concluding “s.”

# 6.d.

## The Scholarly Voice: Hints on Crafting Historical Prose

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Clarity of language demonstrates clarity of thought. Your prose should be precise. Never assume that the reader will know what you're talking about; she or he never will unless you avoid all possible ambiguity. The meanings of every word and phrase must be crystal clear; if they are not, you have not explained sufficiently.

Avoid referring to yourself explicitly ("in this paper I will examine") or implicitly ("it is interesting to examine").

Your paper is about the people in your sources, not the sources themselves. Do not bring attention *in your prose* to your sources or the problems they present (this is what notes are for). Avoid phrases like, "In the collection edited by Ira Berlin, there is the story of a slave man who escaped to freedom." Instead, just tell me the story of the man; if you've cited properly, I'll be able to find your source. Avoid also phrases like, "This document shows that planters abandoned their land with great reluctance." Just say "Some planters abandoned their land with great reluctance."

It is important to keep your "voice" distinct from the "voice" of your subjects. When working closely with the writings of a historical subject, it is easy to forget to identify the author of a thought. Often, *you* wind up looking like the author.

For instance, in explaining William Lloyd Garrison's views on African colonization, your sentence should not read "Those who favored colonization were really hostile to the interests of all black people." This looks like your thought when it is really Garrison's. Identify it as such by adding, "According to Garrison," immediately before.

Here is another example of incorrect use of voice causing confusion about the author of an idea: "Black parents have complained about books containing the word 'n\_\_\_\_\_' being read aloud in class, therefore *Huck Finn* and other novels which use the pejorative term should be excluded from the classroom as racist." The implication here is that *black parents* think the book should be banned, but the sentence technically reads that the *author of the paper* thinks this. This re-write clarifies things: "Black parents have complained about books containing the word

'n\_\_\_\_\_' being read aloud in class, therefore **they think that** *Huck Finn* and other novels which use the pejorative term should be excluded from the classroom as racist."

History takes place in the past. Use the past tense and avoid the present tense. Keep tenses consistent.

A great scholar once told me that good writing is in the verbs. Use active verbs rather than the verb "to be" (and its conjugations), and minimize your use of adjectives.

Make sure you define important concepts. If you argue that Jefferson was neurotic, make sure you define that term.

When introducing a person, identify her or him completely. Only after first using "James Biddle, the president of the first national bank," should you refer to him simply as "Biddle."

Avoid using rhetorical questions to introduce your subject, or for any other reason. Instead, provide the answer to the rhetorical question you wish to pose.

Gendered language: Pay attention to gender-specific language. "The plague killed half of Europe's mankind"? Well, womankind suffered as well. On the other hand, there are times when it is not appropriate to use gender-neutral language. In this sentence – "Catholic law declared that the priest was required to keep his or her vow of celibacy, despite frequent lapses in practice" – gender-neutral language makes no sense, as Catholic priests are by definition men. Thinking about gendered language invites more analysis: "All men are created equal." You might ask yourself if this meant all men and women, all men except slaves, etc. Avoid overuse of male-gender pronouns when their referents are not necessarily male. You may wish to alternate use of "he" and "she" in your paper. Avoid "s/he" or "he/she." It is often possible to make the noun to which a pronoun refers plural, thus obviating the need for a gender-specific pronoun ("their" is gender neutral; "his" is not).

Vague terms and over-generalizations: Terms like "now," "then," "later," "before," "in this period" should refer to clearly-defined dates. "The people," "the masses," and phrases like "white power structure" are vague and generalized, as are "blacks" and "industrialists." Rarely can one generalization capture the nuances of history. Work for specificity; it is more accurate, and much more convincing. Avoid the article "the" that many writers use, for example: "the whites" or "the blacks." This may seem to objectify your subjects and introduce a distasteful tone.

Strive for conciseness. In general, use as few words as possible, but as many as necessary. "His reasons for whipping her included such things as letting her husband enter the army." Why not: "He whipped her for letting her husband enter the army." Wordiness often results from overuse of adjectives, as in "Former slaves were happiest and most content when living with their fraternal and related families." This is redundant and wordy. "Former slaves were happiest when living with their families."

Avoid the passive voice, as in "The bill was passed by Congress." Make active by identifying the subject of the sentence and placing it before the verb, as in "Congress passed the bill."

Choose active verbs: Good writing springs from lively verbs rather than superfluous adjectives. Choose active verbs, and avoid whenever possible dull verbs, like "was." Ask yourself, what was the subject of the sentence *doing*?

When writing on topics in American History, avoid personalizing your analysis by using words such as "we," "our country," and "in our culture." American history, like all others, varies enormously over time and place, and it is best to respect that variety in formal prose.

Avoid parentheses. Instead, set off parenthetical phrases in commas. If this does not work, rewrite the sentence.

There is almost no place for the verb "to feel" in a history paper. The phrase "I feel" is most often used when you are unsure of your evidence and argumentation. Any insight you believe worthy of inclusion in a paper should be stated with confidence.

Do not refer to people in the paper by using their first names alone. In the first reference to a person, use the full name and clearly identify, as in "Joe Smith, Senator from Wisconsin, argued the Republican position."

Avoid personal intrusions, such as "as stated earlier" or "as aforementioned" from your writing.

A final note:

It cannot be stressed enough that writing is the product of dialogues, both with yourself and between you, your professor, and your colleagues. Good writers constantly play with language and ideas, and constantly explore options and alternatives in their heads. Do not expect to write well without engaging in this process.

Writing is re-writing. Good writers have simply internalized many of the rules and idioms that young writers have yet to learn. Yet nobody in the world -- not even the best writers -- can write well without editing. The editing process in the best writers occurs before pen is even put to paper. Allow yourself the time to rewrite, and edit your own work.

## 7.a.

# Presenting Primary Sources in Your Paper

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### 1. What is the difference between quoting and paraphrasing?

When writing about your sources, you may either take the *exact words* from a document and place them between quote marks ("), or you may *paraphrase* the words in a document, in which case you do not put them in quotes.

To *paraphrase* a source (or part of a source) is to reproduce it in words and word orders substantially different from the original. When you paraphrase well, you keep the sense of the original but change the language, retaining possibly a few key words, but otherwise using your own words and sentence patterns. Often, the advantage of paraphrasing is to capture concisely the essence of a passage in your source that would be too long or uninteresting to quote verbatim, or is not important enough to your point to merit lengthy presentation.

To *quote* a source (or part of a source) is to reproduce it exactly. When you quote well, you keep both the sense and the language of the original, retaining its punctuation, its capitalization, its type face (i.e., roman or italic), and its spelling (indeed, even its misspelling). There are special rules for altering quoted material to fit properly in your sentences. We'll get to these in a moment. Quoted material is advantageous in that it lends considerable authority to your argument, and often captures the spirit or style of your topic in ways paraphrasing does not. Still, most students rely too heavily on quoted material. Use it only when it adds something tangible to your prose.

When taking notes, you must be very careful to make it clear whether you are quoting or paraphrasing. Either paraphrase *or* quote, but do nothing in between. *These are your only options.* Anything between the quotes must appear exactly as it does in the original. Do not put paraphrased material in quote marks. As a rough guide, if you copy more than three words in a row from a source, you are quoting: either put them in quote marks or paraphrase them. If you present the text of a source without putting it in quotes, you mis-represent yourself and commit plagiarism; if you put paraphrased material in quotes you mis-represent the text and commit plagiarism.

Note: To "quote" is to make a quotation, and hence a verb; a "quotation" is the thing between the quote-marks, and hence a noun. There is no such thing as simply a "quote."

## 2. What should I quote?

Primary sources are the best candidates for direct quotation. Avoid quoting from secondary sources. You can summarize important points from a secondary source by paraphrasing, but be sure to provide a citation.

You may also use quotation marks to distance yourself from others' language, as in: *Imperialists spoke of "civilising the poor."* Avoid quotation marks as a way of apologizing for your own word choice, slang, clichés --it is better to find the appropriate words.

## 3. How do I integrate quoted material into my prose?

a. It is difficult to integrate quoted material into a sentence and maintain a grammatically correct sentence. A sentence with a quotation in it must read as a grammatically correct sentence; quotations do not change the rules of sentence structure. Test for this by imagining the sentence without quote marks; if it is not grammatically correct when you imagine the quote marks absent, it needs to be re-written.

b. You should never quote material without integrating it into your own writing. A sentence can never consist entirely of a quote. Never just "plop" a quote in, as in: *The conditions freedwomen lived under were very harsh. "My master kept us without food and water for days." Men, on the other hand, had a better time of it.*

c. Introduce the speaker of the quotation. In the example above, the reader has no idea who is speaking. A simple phrase suffices. *One former slave testified, "My master kept us without food and water for days."*

d. More than one sentence should never appear between two quote marks. It is better to quote parts of sentences, integrating them into your own prose. *One white mistress lamented the loss of a slave who ran away. She wished for his return, not because he was a valued worker, but because of "the moral effect" his capture would have on the potential runaway slaves still on her plantation.*

e. Avoid "block" quotes. Most student papers (under fifteen pages) are too short to permit block quotes. Besides, most readers do not read them. Finally, they permit the author to avoid analysis. If you must use block quotations, indent on both sides of the quotation, and single-space. Block quote no less than two sentences, or three lines of text, whichever is longer.

f. It is often difficult to integrate the quote into your prose and retain its original meaning. Be sure not to let vital bits of information slide by the wayside when quoting. Remember, your reader is not looking at your sources as she reads.

g. *Sic*: Because you must quote your source exactly, you may find yourself quoting mis-spellings or statements which seem so outrageous as to belie credulity. Often, authors will insert the



phrase *[sic]* (which means “thus it is”) in or immediately after such quoted material to denote to readers that the error appears in the original. Scholarly opinion differs on this point, but for our purposes, you should not use “sic” when quoting from historical sources; the prevalence of alternate spellings and usages quickly would clutter your paper with “sic.” Use it only when quoting secondaries, which should rarely if ever be done in the body of the text (but may be done in your notes).

h. Using brackets: Remember that a sentence with a quotation must be a grammatically correct sentence when you imagine the quote marks absent. Sometimes, in order to do this, or to clarify the meaning of a quotation, you may think a quotation requires extra words or phrases. These are usually placed in brackets within the quotation to denote added material that does not appear in the original, as in:

The editors of Freedom’s Journal denied vigorously the contention that “our race alone are to remain in this [degraded] state, while knowledge and civilization are shedding their enlivening rays over the rest of the human family.”

Most often, however, additional words placed in brackets are unnecessary. Consider the following sentence, which uses brackets unnecessarily, and a re-written version which does not.

*Original:* One ex-slave described just how slave holders planned their breeding, as she explained, “[The slave holders] would buy a fine girl and a fine man and just put them together like cattle; they would not stop to marry them.” [This sentence is also a run-on sentence because of the comma splice after “breeding”; not that it would not be grammatically correct if the quote marks were removed.]

*Re-written:* One ex-slave described just how slave holders planned their breeding. She explained that slave holders “would buy a fine girl and a fine man and just put them together like cattle; they would not stop to marry them.”

4. How much should I quote? No more than one-quarter (better is one-fifth) of your paper should be quoted material. In individual quotations, always quote the least amount of material possible. By omitting the superfluous, retain the impact of the quotes you include.

5. How do I incorporate punctuation into quotations? Periods and commas always fall within the last quote mark. Semi-colons usually fall without. Question and exclamation marks may fall within or without, depending on the text.

Why did Jefferson claim America held “the wolf by the ears”?

“When I am done with you, you will live no more!” the master cried as he beat the slave.

6. How do quote marks work when I'm quoting someone who is quoting something? Imbedded (or "nested") quotations are denoted with single quote marks instead of the normal double quote marks. According to Chalmers Johnson, "medieval Europe passed through its 'age of discontent' after the fall of the Angevin empire."

7. Eliminate superfluous elements of quotations with elliptical periods ("ellipses").

Whenever you incorporate a non-contiguous portion of a text into a quotation, denote the omission with elliptical periods. An ellipsis is three periods, each with a single space between them. You should *never* omit portions of a sentence so as to alter the meaning of a text, solely to enhance the meaning of a quotation by eliminating confusing or extraneous words.

Original quote: "Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and the hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be more oppressed than you have been -- you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. *Rather die freemen than live to be slaves.* Remember that you are FOUR MILLIONS! It is in your power so to torment the God-cursed slaveholders that they will be glad to let you go free. If the scale was turned, and black men were the masters and white men the slaves, every destructive agent and element would be employed to lay the oppressor low."<sup>2</sup>

Removing the middle of a sentence: Garnet's pamphlet urged his enslaved brethren to consider their advantages and rise up in bloody revolt. "Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. . . . Remember that you are FOUR MILLIONS!"

Here, I used ellipses to omit material I believed lacked relevance to the task at hand. The result is concise, yet does no violence to the meaning of the original passage.

Quoting a contiguous portion of a sentence: Speaking to slaves, Garnet wrote that they should resist so violently against the depredations of their slaveholders "that they will be glad to let you go free." (Here, ellipses were not necessary, as the portion I quoted was contiguous; I did not need ellipses to denote that the quote was the end of a larger sentence.)

Ellipses and commas: Garnet's pamphlet seemed to castigate slave men for a troubling lack of courage. Implying that whites did not share this failing, he argued, "if the scale was turned, . . . every destructive agent and element would be employed to lay the oppressor low." (Note that I retained the comma after "turned" but not before "every." Also, I provided a space between the comma after "turned" and the first period of the ellipses.)

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<sup>2</sup>Henry Highland Garnet, *A Memorial Discourse; by Rev. Henry Highland Garnet* (Philadelphia, 1865), 51, in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York: Citadel Press, 1951), I, 232.

Ellipses with sentence endings: Garnet told the slaves to “strike for your lives and liberties. . . . Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered.” (Note that I put a period immediately after “liberties” [to denote the end of the sentence], then put an ellipsis [after a normal space], the added *two spaces* after the ellipsis before moving on to the next sentence [because two spaces always separate two sentences].)

8. What do I do when the original author used funny type or mis-spells words?

Remember, proper quotation style means preserving the original text to the greatest degree possible.

To the best of your ability, reproduce the original text as exactly it appears. This means reproducing italics, underlining, and small capitals when they appear in the original. Because typewriters were so limited in reproducing text, it is acceptable to underline instead of italicize, and use large capitals instead of small capitals.

Some authors choose to italicize portions of a quote to emphasize them. Consequently, you may see phrases like “author’s emphasis,” or “emphasis in original” in footnotes. Emphasizing non-italicized material is an unacceptable short-cut to analyzing that material; instead, simply explain the important part of the quotation. Do not emphasize anything not originally italicized; consequently, you will not need phrases like “author’s emphasis” in your footnotes.

Archaic or foreign characters, like “æ,” may be rendered in Anglicized fashion, e.g., “ae.”

When an author mis-spells a word, or says something so outrageous that it may stretch the credulity of modern readers, it was customary to add the Latin “sic” in brackets. This word means “so,” and tells readers that what appears in a scholar’s rendition of the text was in fact what appeared in the original. Make it your rule to render all text as it originally appeared. This will obviate the need to use “sic,” which many readers find intrusive.

9. What about those brackets I see everyone using?

Quotations may never include material not in the original. But there are times when it seems necessary to add material to a quotation to make it understandable to the reader. It has become increasingly common journalistic practice to include such material inside brackets (“[ ]”). While at times the use of brackets may be necessary, the practice has gotten completely out of hand. Avoid using brackets! Often, they are a substitute for the real work of writing. Consider this reference to the writings of Harlem Renaissance philosopher Alain Locke, by Mia Bay<sup>3</sup>:

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<sup>3</sup>Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 199.

The “actual practical dominance” of this group would naturally lead it to “notions of superiority and also a very firm belief in superiority,” he observed. But they could be wrong, “as the Romans were when they succeeded in sapping and undermining Greek civilization [, to consider] their own civilization superior, when[,] in fact, [as in the case of the Romans,] we know that it was relatively inferior [to that of the conquered Greeks,] from the point of view of general civilization and culture.”

The use of such extensive brackets is intrusive and confusing. A little thought and some time re-working the passage would have yielded far more elegant results:

The “actual practical dominance” this group would naturally lead it to “notions of superiority and also a very firm belief in superiority,” he observed. The Romans, for example, had been wrong to consider “their own civilization superior” when they “succeeded in sapping and undermining Greek civilization”; Roman civilization, according to Locke, “was relatively inferior” to that of the conquered Greeks.

# 7.b.

## Citing Sources

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A citation is the part of your paper that tells your reader where your source information came from. This is one of the most important elements to your paper. In order to evaluate your argument, your reader must be able to consult the same sources you used. Proper citing is crucial to making a credible and persuasive argument, and to conforming to professional standards of proof.

**Use the note format.** Citations in history papers can take the form of footnotes or endnotes. History papers should not use the parenthetical citation style common to literature and social science papers. These do not perform the other function of footnotes and endnotes, which is to provide space to clarify your use of complex data or arguments, expand on points you believe do not merit lengthy consideration in the body of your text, and to directly address the arguments of other historians.

**How footnotes work.** Each time you quote a work by another author, or use the ideas of another author, you should indicate the source with a footnote. A footnote is indicated in the text of your paper by a small arabic numeral written in superscript. Each new footnote gets a new number (increment by one); do not repeat a footnote number you've already used, even if the earlier reference is to the same work. The number refers to a note number at the bottom of the page (or following the text of the paper, if you are using endnotes). This note contains the citation information for the materials you are referencing. For examples of footnotes in action, consult Rampolla ("Quoting and Documenting Sources").

**What must be cited?** You must acknowledge the sources of quotations, paraphrases, arguments, and specific references you may use. You need not cite sources to what most would generally consider common knowledge, like the fact that Lincoln won the Presidential election of 1860. But you must cite your source for any claim that appears to contradict common knowledge, like that Lincoln won the southern states in that election (since he wasn't even on the ballot in most southern states, this claim is controversial and must be supported). And you must cite matters of interpretation, such as an author's ideas in *why* Lincoln appealed to so many voters. If you are in doubt about citing "common knowledge" information, err on the side of citing; even unintended failure to cite sources constitutes technical plagiarism.

**Should I use footnotes or endnotes?** Either of these is fine. Most history books are now produced using endnotes, which are commonly thought to provide cleaner looking pages. Most history

professors, however, prefer footnotes, so they can quickly check sources. Especially if you have a computer word-processor, which makes the task easy, you should try to use footnotes.

### **What should I cite?**

The easiest and most important rule to remember is: when in doubt, it is better to cite a source than to not cite a source. In avoiding plagiarism, it is always wiser to choose more rather than less information.

In a research paper for history, you generally need not cite common knowledge. Common knowledge may be considered any information readily available in any encyclopedia. Common knowledge may be comprised of basic historical facts, such as dates of events and place names. For example, everyone knows that the Battle of Gettysburg occurred from July 1-3, 1863, in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. No need to include the source of this basic information.

Arcane or debated facts of the past, however, need to be cited. These are not readily accessible facts, agreed upon by all. No one knows when exactly Jesus Christ lived, so if you include set dates for his birth and death, you need to cite the author who claims to know these things.

As this suggests, you must cite all information that constitutes another author's interpretations or arguments. Remember, the point of citation is to acknowledge the sources of ideas that are not your own, and to provide a path back through your research so other scholars can check your work. If you do not include citations, your reader cannot know where your ideas came from, and cannot check controversial statements you might make.

Matters of historical interpretation are particularly important to cite. Let's consider the Gettysburg example again. The date and place of the battle are common knowledge no one would think to dispute. But what about the argument that the Confederacy lost the battle primarily because General Longstreet failed to flank the Union forces on the left? Or that Confederate cavalry general J.E.B. Stuart was the primary cause of defeat because he failed to stay close to the Confederate army? Or that Union Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain saved the Union by protecting the Union's left flank at Little Round Top? All such claims are debatable points of interpretation. They are not facts of the past, but arguments. If you incorporate such claims by other authors in your paper, you must cite your sources.

### **How much to cite?**

Remember to include a source citation every time you use the ideas or words of another author, either directly (through quotation) or indirectly (through paraphrase). The only exception is common factual knowledge of the variety found in encyclopedia.

Some papers, particularly those that require less argumentation and analysis on your part, are drawn almost wholly from other sources. In such instances, you might find yourself citing a

source for virtually every sentence. Sometimes, it might be the same source. In these cases, it is acceptable to include one footnote for the entire paragraph. Make sure, however, that every page of the source used is referenced in the footnote. You may not do this if your information comes from several sources, or if the paragraph is interrupted by a quotation.

**Before putting pen to paper (or finger to keyboard):** Make sure you study your style manuals so you will avoid these common pitfalls

- misplacing footnote numbers and misusing punctuation marks in sentences with quotations
- overusing brackets within quotations to clarify meanings (avoid at all costs!)
- errors in differences between first citations, subsequent citations, and repeat citations

Guides for citing non-electronic sources

- Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Manual to Writing in History*, 3rd ed.
- Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th ed.
- Research and Documentation Online (online guide from Bedford/St. Martin's Press)  
<<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/hacker/resdoc/history/footnotes.htm>>

Guides for citing standard electronic sources

- A Brief Citation Guide for Internet Sources in History and the Humanities  
<<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/about/citation/>>
- Online! from Bedford's/St. Martin's Press  
<<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/index.html>>
- Citing Electronic Sources (from the Library of Congress)  
<<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/resources/cite/index.html>>

Online styles manuals with examples of Turabian format abound. Their quality can vary (be particularly watchful for those that do not include samples of Chicago-style citation). Here are a few reliable ones:

- Turabian Documentation  
<<http://library.austincc.edu/research/guides/turabian/turabian.htm>>
- Turabian Examples  
<<http://www.ithaca.edu/library/course/turabian.html>>
- Turabian Citation Guide  
<[http://www.hsu.edu/dept/lib/e\\_resources/e\\_library/citation\\_styles/turabian/turabian\\_online.htm](http://www.hsu.edu/dept/lib/e_resources/e_library/citation_styles/turabian/turabian_online.htm)>

Consult also the library's list of style manuals at <<http://library.bowdoin.edu/eref/write.shtml>>

You may be using online resources, such as the CIS Masterfile, to find some of your documents. But you will be looking at them on paper. You need not cite on-line finding aids such as Lexis-Nexis or CIS Masterfile.

# 7.c.

## Advanced Citation

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### Guides for non-electronic sources

- Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Manual to Writing in History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
- Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.
- *Research and Documentation Online* (online guide from Bedford/St. Martin's Press) ([online](#))

### Guides for standard electronic sources

- *A Brief Citation Guide for Internet Sources in History and the Humanities* ([online](#))
  - *Online!* from Bedford's/St. Martin's Press ([online](#))
- You will be using online resources, such as the CIS Masterfile, to find some of your documents. But you will be looking at them on paper. You need not cite on-line finding aids such as Lexis-Nexis or CIS Masterfile.

### Historical government documents

Government documents often require complex citations; historical government documents are particularly difficult to cite. As there is no single citation format widely agreed upon, citations should include as much relevant information as possible, presented consistently with other citation forms. Use these as samples.

#### A document from the Serial Set

##### Bibliography:

*Farmers, Merchants, and Mechanics, of Newcastle County, Delaware, Opposed to Nullification, and for Protective Tariff of Duties.* H.R. Doc. No. 100, 22<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess. (1832), serial 234.

##### Note:



<sup>12</sup>*Farmers, Merchants, and Mechanics, of Newcastle County, Delaware, Opposed to Nullification, and for Protective Tariff of Duties* (H.R. Doc. No. 100, 22<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess. [1832], serial 234), 142-48.

### A document from the *Congressional Globe*

The *Congressional Globe* was a serial publication that recorded the daily activities of Congress from 1833-73. Before the *Globe* appeared, the *Annals of Congress* (1789-1825), and *Register of Debates in Congress* (1825 - 1837) performed this function. (The *Congressional Record* currently does.)

#### Bibliography:

*Congressional Globe*. Washington, D.C.: Blair & Rives, 1834\_1873. [As with other serials, do not include individual articles from the *Globe* in your bibliography.]

#### Note:

<sup>9</sup>"Expenditures and the Tariff: Speech of Jabez L.M. Curry, of Alabama, in the House of Representatives," *Congressional Globe*, 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess. (February 24, 1859), 268-69.

### A law from the *Statutes at Large*

#### Bibliography:

"An Act to Extend the Laws of the United States over the State of Texas, and for Other Purposes." *Statutes at Large*, 29<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess. (1845): 1-2.

#### Note:

<sup>4</sup>"An Act to Extend the Laws of the United States over the State of Texas, and for Other Purposes," *Statutes at Large*, 29<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess. (1845), 1-2.

## Archival sources

### Citing archival sources: basic principles

Because different archives organize their materials in different ways, developing a consistent citation format can be challenging. Remember, the most important principle in crafting citations: is that readers must be able to find the sources you used so they can check your work. Citation formats

should therefore be consistent, complete, and accurate. The following guidelines may be of some help.

The basic citation format for material from archives consists of three parts.

1. The source itself. This will probably be a diary, letter, or other manuscript item. The citation format will vary, depending on the source type. Follow Turabian and Rampolla for how to cite these sources.

William H. Parham to Jacob C. White, Jr., October 6, 1862

2. Collection information. Following this, include information about the collection and archive from which the source comes. In general, this will include the name of the collection within the archive, the name of the archive itself, and (in a bibliographic citation only) the city and state of the archive.

Gardiner Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania,  
Philadelphia, Pa.

3. Detail information. In the same way that page numbers follow regular book and article citations, detail information on the location of the source should follow the rest of the citation for your source.

Box 6G, folder 17a.

### Note format

For foot- and endnotes, include source information, collection information (without city and state), and detail information. Items in a note are most often separated by a comma.

<sup>7</sup>William H. Parham to Jacob C. White, Jr., October 6, 1862,  
Gardiner Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Box  
6G, folder 17a.

<sup>43</sup>James Barnard Blake diary, January 15, 1851, American  
Antiquarian Society.

<sup>19</sup>Joshua Reynolds letterbook, May 21, 1843, Reynolds-  
Childress Collection, Montgomery County Historical Society,  
drawer 12 (correspondence 1838-44), folder 3.

### Bibliography

For bibliography, include just the collection and archive information, including city and state. Items in a bibliography are most often separated by a period.

Gardiner Collection. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.  
Philadelphia, Pa.

James Barnard Blake diary. American Antiquarian Society.  
Worcester, Mass.

Joshua Reynolds letterbook. Reynolds-Childress Collection,  
Montgomery County Historical Society. Silver Spring, Md.

# 8.a.

## Paper-Writing Checklist

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Before submitting your paper, complete the following checklist.

### INTRODUCTION

- My introductory paragraph tells the reader the subject of my research, and defines key terms I will use in my thesis.
- My introduction contains a clearly-stated thesis which explains how and why something happened.

### PARAGRAPHS

- I have thought about how my paragraphs are arranged, and they are structured in a way that best supports my argument.
- I have checked to make sure that I completely tackle one part of my argument before moving on to the next, and I have checked to make sure that I do not unnecessarily revisit arguments I began earlier in the paper.
- Each paragraph is focused around a main idea (“mini-thesis”), which is stated in the paragraph’s first sentence (“topic sentence”).
- Each paragraph employs evidence supporting that idea. That evidence is analyzed; that is, I have used my own words to tell the reader why and how my evidence supports the topic sentence.
- Each paragraph has a workable transition from its predecessor.

### ARGUMENTATION

- I have thought about the arguments that could be marshaled against mine, and have addressed those through refutation or concession.

### QUOTING AND CITATION

- All material I have quoted appears between quote marks.
- I have minimized or eliminated block quotes. When I have used them, I have indented them on the left, single-spaced them, and not placed quotations at the start and end.
- Each time I bring in evidence that is not clearly common knowledge, I have cited the source of that information with a foot- or end-note.
- Each time I quote I have checked to make sure the quotation is properly integrated into the sentence.

- Each of my quotes clearly relates to a foot- or end-note which offers the source and page number of the quotation.
- For each of my quotes, it is clear who the speaker of the quote is, and the circumstances in which the speaker authored the quote (relevant time, place, and context).
- My foot- or end-note style conforms to the style in my style manual.
- I have included a bibliography of my sources, which conforms to the style of my style manual.

#### STYLE

- Each page is numbered consecutively.
- I have used a common typeface, like Courier12, or Times Roman.
- I have double-spaced the paper, and have left one-inch margins at top, bottom, and sides.
- The title of my paper clearly relates to its contents, or to the question I have been asked to answer.

#### EDITING

- I have proofread the paper for spelling and grammar errors.
- I have re-written the paper at least once, identifying and eliminating instances of:
  - ▶ passive voice
  - ▶ inconsistent tenses
  - ▶ subject/verb disagreement
  - ▶ dangling clauses
  - ▶ improper pronoun references
  - ▶ comma splices, run-on sentences, and sentence fragments
  - ▶ colloquial phrases
- I have read the paper aloud to myself or to someone else, listening for sentences that do not work.

# 8.b.

## Peer Evaluations

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Prepare an evaluation of the paper you have been assigned. In addition to this evaluation, you are free to make comments on the paper you receive in order to suggest alternate wordings or punctuation, to correct mis-spellings, or to make other comments you believe are relevant (you will return this edited paper to the author). Take these evaluations seriously. Too often, peer evaluators do not look hard enough for or think hard enough about problems in student papers. Developing meaningful critiques of colleagues' work is central to the scholarly process. These evaluations are an important part of your grade. You are not merely aiding your colleagues in writing clearly, you are demonstrating your own ability to read critically. Prepare two copies of your evaluation: one for the author of the paper you are evaluating, and one for me. Your peer evaluation should provide a detailed answer for each of these questions:

### **Thesis and structure:**

14. What is the paper about?
15. What is the thesis question it strives to answer?
16. What is the thesis?
17. What is the paper's "road map"? How is it structured to argue its thesis?
18. Where (in which paragraphs) does the argument stray?

### **The thesis itself:**

19. What unanswered questions does it raise?
20. What alternative explanations could be offered for the phenomenon described?
21. What criticisms does the author need to anticipate?
22. Given the thesis, what examples or scenarios could make it wrong?
23. How could the thesis be modified to overcome these shortcomings?

### **Topic sentences and paragraphs:**

24. Which topic sentences do not relate to the thesis?
25. Which topic sentences fail to tell readers where they are in the road map?
26. In which paragraphs is the "mini-thesis" unclear?
27. Which paragraphs fail to support the topic sentence?
28. Which paragraphs contain awkward or non-existent transitions to the next paragraph?

### **Use of evidence:**

29. In which paragraphs is there no primary source evidence to support the mini-thesis, or inappropriate evidence?
30. In which paragraphs does the author present primary source evidence, yet fail to explain why that evidence supports the mini-thesis?
31. Where has the author presented primary source evidence without adequately citing its source?
32. Where has the author presented primary source evidence without correctly incorporating it into the author's prose?

## 8.c.

# Frequent Grading Comments

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These are the most common comments I make regarding the structure, logic, and argument of your paper. If you see "C1" beside a paragraph, you can refer to the corresponding comment on this sheet.

### A. INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

1. The paragraph is too general. You talk about many big issues rather than work towards presenting your thesis. As a result, key terms in your thesis statement are left undefined. Think hard about your thesis: What key concepts are most important to define? What information will the reader find necessary to understand the thesis?
2. The argument in this thesis is too simple and obvious. The thesis does little to move beyond your introduction. It doesn't make an argument that will require you to develop your paper. You need to ask a question about your sources to which you did know the answer before you began your research.
3. This thesis is not specific enough. Can you tell me more exactly and specifically *how and why something happened*? Perhaps it would help to break down this general thesis into components: did things change over time? By region? What are the different *parts* of this argument?
4. I cannot identify the thesis here. Can you modify this thesis to tell why or how something happened?
5. This thesis has vague terms. What exactly do you mean by the terms I underlined? By clarifying them, you will give me a better and more specific sense of what your argument entails.

### B. TOPIC SENTENCES

1. This topic sentence is true, but doesn't seem to support your thesis. In part, this is because your thesis requires clarification.



2. This topic sentence is true, but doesn't seem to support your thesis. Can you relate it more clearly to your thesis?
3. How did we get from the last paragraph to this one? You need a transition (either in last sentence of preceding paragraph or in this topic sentence) to tell the reader why you're moving on to this new topic.
4. This paragraph has no topic sentence, or one that does not seem to have a "mini-thesis" that supports your thesis.
5. Primary source evidence generally should not appear in the topic sentence.
6. The first sentence of this paragraph does not look like a topic sentence, which should relate back to your thesis. How does this advance your argument?

#### C. USE OF EVIDENCE

1. This quote is "plopped in." It appears without being integrated into a sentence.
2. This quote is not properly integrated into your prose.
3. Regarding this quote, who said this, and why?
4. This quote needs more context to make sense.
5. This quote is not analyzed. You must explain to your reader exactly how this quote supports your topic sentence or argument.
6. This quote is too long, or is a block quote. Avoid block quotes. Break up and paraphrase long quotes, omitting everything extraneous.

#### D. PARAGRAPHS

1. You simply need more evidence to support your point in this paragraph.
2. There is evidence in this paragraph, but it doesn't seem to support your point.
3. This is a good concluding sentence to your paragraph (it nicely sums up its argument), but the paragraph needs more evidence to support this conclusion.

4. This paragraph needs a concluding sentence to sum up the argument here, and perhaps provide a transition to the next paragraph.
5. Link this paragraph back to your thesis statement. How exactly does it support your argument or clarify your thesis?
6. This paragraph does not seem to support a thesis. What is its purpose in your paper?

#### E. LOGIC AND ARGUMENT

1. You used this term earlier, but in a different way. You need to clearly define this term at the outset (probably the first paragraph) and use it clearly and consistently thereafter.
2. We've seen parts of this argument earlier in this paper. Re-structure so that you are not jumping back and forth between arguments. Argue each "mini-thesis" in only one place, then move on.
3. This argument is too general. It cannot be correct, because there are too many possible exceptions to it. Be more specific.
4. There are easy counter-arguments to this position. You need to address and deflect them.

# 8.d.

## Generic Grading Rubric

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### THE SUPERIOR PAPER (A/A-)

**Thesis:** Easily identifiable, plausible, novel, sophisticated, insightful, crystal clear.

**Structure:** Evident, understandable, appropriate for thesis. Excellent transitions from point to point. Paragraphs support solid topic sentences.

**Use of evidence:** Primary source information used to buttress every point with at least one example. Examples support mini-thesis and fit within paragraph. Excellent integration of quoted material into sentences.

**Analysis:** Author clearly relates evidence to mini-thesis; analysis is fresh and exciting, posing new ways to think of the material.

**Logic and argumentation:** All ideas in the paper flow logically; the argument is identifiable, reasonable, and sound. Author anticipates and successfully defuses counter-arguments; makes novel connections to outside material (from other parts of the class, or other classes) which illuminate thesis.

**Mechanics:** Sentence structure, grammar, and diction excellent; correct use of punctuation and citation style; minimal to no spelling errors; absolutely no run-on sentences or comma splices.

### THE GOOD PAPER (B+/B/B-)

**Thesis:** Promising, but may be slightly unclear, or lacking in insight or originality.

**Structure:** Generally clear and appropriate, though may wander occasionally. May have a few unclear transitions, or a few paragraphs without strong topic sentences.

**Use of evidence:** Examples used to support most points. Some evidence does not support point, or may appear where inappropriate. Quotes well integrated into sentences.

**Analysis:** Evidence often related to mini-thesis, though links perhaps not very clear.

**Logic and argumentation:** Argument of paper is clear, usually flows logically and makes sense. Some evidence that counter-arguments acknowledged, though perhaps not addressed. Occasional insightful connections to outside material made.

**Mechanics:** Sentence structure, grammar, and diction strong despite occasional lapses; punctuation and citation style often used correctly. Some (minor) spelling errors; may have one run-on sentence, sentence fragment, or comma splice

### THE "NEEDS HELP" PAPER (C+/C/C-)

**Thesis:** May be unclear (contain many vague terms), appear unoriginal, or offer relatively little that is new; provides little around which to structure the paper.

**Structure:** Generally unclear, often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions, many paragraphs without topic sentences.

**Use of evidence:** Examples used to support some points. Points often lack supporting evidence, or evidence used where inappropriate (often because there may be no clear point). Quotes may be poorly integrated into sentences.

**Analysis:** Quotes appear often without analysis relating them to mini-thesis (or there is a weak mini-thesis to support), or analysis offers nothing beyond the quote.

**Logic and argumentation:** Logic may often fail, or argument may often be unclear. May not address counter-arguments or make any outside connections. May contain logical contradictions.

**Mechanics:** Problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction (usually not major). Errors in punctuation, citation style, and spelling. May have several run-on sentences or comma splices.

### THE "TRULY NEEDY" PAPER (D+/D/D-)

**Thesis:** Difficult to identify at all, may be bland restatement of obvious point.

**Structure:** Unclear, often because thesis is weak or non-existent. Transitions confusing and unclear. Few topic sentences.

**Use of evidence:** Very few or very weak examples. General failure to support statements, or evidence seems to support no statement. Quotes not integrated into sentences; "plopped in" in improper manner.

**Analysis:** Very little or very weak attempt to relate evidence to argument; may be no identifiable argument, or no evidence to relate it to.

**Logic and argumentation:** Ideas do not flow at all, usually because there is no argument to support. Simplistic view of topic; no effort to grasp possible alternative views. Many logical contradictions, or simply too incoherent to determine.

**Mechanics:** Big problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction. Frequent major errors in citation style, punctuation, and spelling. May have many run-on sentences and comma splices.

### THE FAILING PAPER

Shows obviously minimal lack of effort or comprehension of the assignment. Very difficult to understand owing to major problems with mechanics, structure, and analysis. Has no identifiable thesis, or utterly incompetent thesis.

## 9.a.

### Making the Case: Samples

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**Sample 1:** Starting in the 1890s, the legislatures of the southern states began to pass a series of laws which by intent and practice removed African Americans from the voting population. Twenty years after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, African-American men found themselves steadily disfranchised through legal chicaneries like grandfather clauses, literacy tests, and all-white primaries. Historians have long wondered why this new spate of legislation appeared so long after the failure of the Republican Party in 1877. If Reconstruction ended black Americans' dreams of meaningful political equality, why did Southern whites delay for over a decade their efforts to disfranchise blacks? Perhaps the new measures signaled not the continuation of old forms of racial control, but the rise of a new, more hostile form of racial thought among white Southerners. Legal disfranchisement did not begin until twelve years after the end of Reconstruction, for it took an economic downturn in the South and the coming of age of the first generation of southern African Americans born into freedom to trigger overt legal efforts to keep blacks away from the polls.

**Sample 2:** The continuing trend of American westward expansion reached Mexico in the early nineteenth century and manifested in the Mexican-American War. After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, the policy toward the United States changed. Instead of the strict border policies as under Spain, Mexico welcomed Americans: a decision they would soon regret. Americans migrated to Mexico in droves. Eventually, more Americans lived in the Texas than Mexicans. This led to Texas breaking away from Mexico and the beginning of the Mexican-American War. The Mexican-American War was not only a quest for increased territory, but also a symbol of America's racial misconception of the inferiority of non-white peoples, manifested in the motives, justifications and reactions to the war.

**Sample 3:** This problem of representation arose as a direct result of market forces in antebellum America. As fixing identity in an ever-expanding and increasingly anonymous public sphere became an ever more infeasible task, weak surrogate means arose. When Lewis Woodson wrote to Samuel Cornish that "nothing is more common in men, than to associate a cause, with him who advocates it," he may just as sagely have applied his formulation to ethnic and national groups. Nothing was more common in the antebellum North than to associate a people with the individuals who represented it. For this reason, black leaders incessantly warned their working-class brethren to consider the broader implications of their actions. In the 1840s, a southern black traveler noted this concern among Philadelphia's black elite: "the sight of one man, whatever may be his apparent

condition, is the sight of a community; and the errors and crimes of one, is adjudged as the criterion and character of the whole body." In a world wherein it was impossible to know the character of the ones with whom the average urbanite interacted, ethnic, racial, and national signifiers – however faulty as determinants of character – seemed to offer desperately needed cues.

#### Sample 4

- Premises to thesis question
  - German experience with tactical air power
  - Elaborate defense system of the homeland
  - German fighter designs extremely good
  - Germany developed tactical fighter doctrine
- The “fulcrum”: restate problem and shift to proving thesis itself
  - Production inadequacies
  - Doctrinal problems
  - These factors led to defeat despite apparent advantages
- Conclusion (restate problem and thesis, explain significance)

**Sample 5:** Historians may argue about whether the Allied bombing of Germany helped end World War II, but none doubt the destructiveness of these campaigns. By the end of the conflict, Allied bomber forces were able to attack targets in Germany without encountering the serious opposition of German fighters. This is surprising, as Germany possessed many apparent advantages in its fighter force: long experience with tactical air power, good fighter designs, an elaborate system of homeland defense, and a well-developed tactical fighter doctrine. How, then, did the Allies become capable of bombing Germany with impunity? By the end of World War II, German air defense suffered from two limitations that doomed its capacity to protect the homeland: the limits of a fighter doctrine predicated on attack, and severe inadequacies in producing new fighters. These factors led to defeat despite Germany’s apparent advantages.

## 9.b.

### Making the Case: Sample Essay

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*The following example of a student paper helps illustrate the points made in talk.*

#### “Nineteenth-Century Chinese America: Labor Unrest and the Role of Merchants”

All Chinese immigrants to northern California in the mid-nineteenth century, impoverished laborers and the wealthier class of merchants alike, faced a gauntlet of legal, social, and political hostility. Chinese Americans responded to the hostilities of Euro-American society through organizations based on ethnic solidarity, called district associations. Nearly all Chinese Americans belonged to district associations, which sought to protect the civil rights of immigrants, supply them with employment opportunities, and adjudicate conflicts between them. The Chinese Six Companies, which was composed of the leaders of the district associations, claimed to represent the interests of all district associations, and thus all Chinese immigrants. The Chinese Six Companies spearheaded organized and often successful campaigns against legal and social discrimination. But, significantly, it launched no such campaigns against the economic hostility to which all Chinese were subjected, particularly by working-class Chinese laborers. By not supporting an organized response to economic hostility, merchants constrained the possibility of an effective Chinese-American labor movement which could protect Chinese workers from exploitation.

Important questions to ask of the first paragraph:

1. What is the thesis question?
2. What are the premises underlying it?
3. What is the thesis?
4. What are the separate claims in the thesis?
5. What is the road map?

*Now, let's work through the questions.*

**Thesis question:** Given that the Chinese Six Companies charged themselves with the protecting the interests of all Chinese immigrants, why did it not more effectively champion the economic (as opposed to legal and social) interests of working-class Chinese immigrant laborers?

*Components of the thesis question (i.e., thesis question premises):*

- There were Chinese immigrants in America, some of whom were working class.
- There was an institution known as the Chinese Six Companies which claimed to represent the interests of all Chinese.
- The Chinese Six Companies effectively championed the legal and social interests of Chinese immigrants.
- But it did not effectively champion their economic interests.

*These are all premises to your thesis question. They are often (though far from always) expressed in the form of "given that such and such was the case, why or how did something happen in the past. Their truth must be demonstrated simply in order for you to ask your question. If even one of the premises to your thesis question is proven false, critics may claim that you are asking a bad or wrong question.*

*Why bother trying to add thesis premises at all? Why not just ask a broad, simple question that contains fewer premises? For two reasons. First, good problems are only problems when there are premises to the thesis question. One might ask, "why did the United States drop the atomic bomb on Japan in 1945?" An easy answer here might be "to win the war." If we ask a more tightly focused question – "given that Japan was militarily defeated and that the Soviet Union had just entered the war against Japan, why did the United States drop the atomic bomb on Japan in 1945?" – we are guaranteed a much more focused, and more provocative, discussion.*

*Second, we should bother with thesis premises because by adding these "given that"s to your question, you actually make your job easier. You narrow your focus and make your problem tighter. It is always better to have a tighter problem than a looser one. A loose problem does not give you a structure for working out the answer. A tight one does, by giving you a clearer, more full "road map." It also demonstrates to your reader that you have a solid, sophisticated understanding of your topic.*

**Thesis:** The Chinese Six Companies did not effectively protect the interests of Chinese immigrant workers because it was dominated by a merchant class which forestalled formation of a Chinese labor movement. It did this by stressing cultural solidarity among all Chinese people, by asserting merchants' experience as the norm for all, and by putting the interests of the merchants ahead of the interests of Chinese laborers.

*Components of the thesis (i.e., stepping stones toward the conclusion):*

- The Chinese Six Companies was dominated by a merchant class.
- This merchant class forestalled the formation of a Chinese labor movement.
- It did it by stressing the cultural unity of all Chinese people (and thus muting class differences among Chinese immigrants).
- It did it by asserting merchants' experience as the norm for all.
- It did it by putting the interests of the merchants ahead of the interests of Chinese laborers.



*These are the logical steps necessary to prove that your thesis is correct. If you fail to demonstrate the validity of any of these, critics may rightly claim that you have failed to make your case.*

*As you see, there is often a chain of logic. In this example, it will be impossible to prove step four (that the Chinese Six Companies asserted merchants' experience as the norm for all) unless step one has been proven (that the Chinese Six Companies was dominated by a merchant class).*

**Road map:** The “road map” for the paper should look something like this:

1. There were Chinese immigrants in America, some of whom were working class.
2. There was an institution known as the Chinese Six Companies which claimed to represent their interests.
3. The Chinese Six Companies effectively championed the legal and social interests of Chinese immigrants.
4. But it did not effectively champion their economic interests.  
*This is the “fulcrum” around which the paper turns. It is the point at which the paper moves from setting up the problem to moving toward the solution. It is the best point for re-stating the thesis question.*
5. The Chinese Six Companies was dominated by a merchant class.
6. This merchant class forestalled the formation of a Chinese labor movement.
7. It did it by stressing the cultural unity of all Chinese people (and thus muting class differences among Chinese immigrants).
8. It did it by asserting merchants' experience as the norm for all.
9. It did it by putting the interests of the merchants ahead of the interests of Chinese laborers.

*You can see here that a road map is not the traditional outline. It is a practical, working scheme which tells you what you must do in order to make your case. Each one of these “stepping stones,” or points in your road map, is a “mini-thesis,” and thus may serve as the topic sentence of a paragraph. There is some flexibility in how you arrange your road map, but the possibilities are finite. This is actually the great virtue of this system – that once you prepare a good road map, you will know what you need to do. Your work will become more focused, and you will spend your energy more efficiently.*

*The other great virtue of a well-prepared road map is that your argument is broken down into discrete steps. Your paper no longer feels like a single intimidating eight-page argument; instead it feels like a series of rather short “mini-arguments,” each of which may be tackled on its own. If you make your case in each mini-argument, you will automatically make a good overall argument.*

**Getting real:** I do not suggest that everyone adopt this model wholesale. The writing and thinking process often is not neat enough to quickly fit into the model I have propounded. It is often so difficult and so important to start putting ideas down on paper that I do not want you to feel unnecessarily constrained. But I do suggest that this is a useful way of thinking about the writing process. You may find it easier to apply this model in evaluating your first drafts rather than in preparing them. It makes sense to apply it at some point in your writing process. This, after all, is the model I use to evaluate papers. I ask these same questions of your paper that I am suggesting you ask yourself: What is the thesis question and what are its premises? What is the thesis and its

stepping stones? What is the chain of reasoning necessary to make the author's case? Good luck with your writing!

*Now, here is the essay. I've included just the first and last paragraph, and the topic sentences in between. Does it adhere to the road map we constructed?*

### “Nineteenth-Century Chinese America: Labor Unrest and the Role of Merchants”

All Chinese immigrants to northern California in the mid-nineteenth century, both impoverished laborers and the wealthier class of merchants, faced a gauntlet of legal, social, and political hostility. Chinese Americans responded to the hostilities of Euro-American society through organizations based on ethnic solidarity, called district associations. Nearly all Chinese Americans belonged to district associations, which sought to protect the civil rights of immigrants, supply them with employment opportunities, and adjudicate conflicts between them. The Chinese Six Companies, which was composed of the leaders of the district associations, claimed to represent the interests of all district associations (and thus all Chinese immigrants) before the dominant white society. The Chinese Six Companies spearheaded organized and often successful campaigns against legal and social discrimination. Significantly, no such campaigns emerged against the economic hostility to which all Chinese were subjected, particularly by working-class Chinese laborers. By not supporting an organized response to economic hostility, merchants constrained the possibility of an effective Chinese-American labor movement which could protect Chinese workers from exploitation.

Chinese American merchants and laborers experienced the brunt of political, legal, and social hostility equally.

While many white Americans indiscriminately expressed their hostility at Chinese Americans, some legal measures disproportionately burdened laborers.

Operating on the premise of ethnic solidarity, merchants spearheaded and achieved most of all the political and legal successes of Chinese Americans in the nineteenth century.

Although merchants often acted in the interests of the entire Chinese American community, they did mobilize on behalf of laborers exclusively.

While a concerted protest voice in the Chinese American community emerged against legal and political discrimination, no such legacy of economic protest exists.

Economic hostility was of a different nature than legal and social hostility.

Beginning in the 1860s, and growing in the 1870s, Chinese-American laborers increasingly found themselves as wage earners dependent on white and Chinese-American employers.

The introduction of Chinese-American laborers into economic spheres traditionally dominated by organized white laborers signaled the bubbling up of economic hostility towards Chinese-American laborers.

Active labor unrest in the Chinese-American community did take place, but the strikes which did occur were only anomalies in a larger trend toward passive labor unrest.

The historiography of labor unrest in nineteenth century Chinese America is scant, and perhaps understandably so considering how little agitation Chinese-American laborers caused.

While Mei presents compelling reasons for a lack of active labor unrest, she fails to address the responsibility merchants owed to Chinese-American laborers.

However, historians have failed to propose a nuanced understanding of merchant-labor relations in light of the economic transition laborers faced as they responded to white hostility.

Historians have stripped laborers of agency in the face of economic pressures.

The merchant economy operated in a vacuum. It was impervious to white economic hostility and competition.

Moreover, sources of patronage different for both merchants and laborers.

Chinese-American laborers may have been encouraged to pursue entrepreneurial ventures when they saw the financial success which merchants enjoyed from avoiding white economic hostility.

The role merchants played in the recruitment of laborers fostered the development of a labor force which would remain compliant to the structure of leadership and representation in the Chinese-American community.

It is insufficient to remark that the merchants did not foment labor unrest merely because it was not in the best interest of the merchants. Merchants clearly exhibited that they could act in the interests of laborers in some instances. By studying more closely the role which merchants played in reference to economic transition and unrest amongst Chinese-American laborers, one gains a sense of a fuller, more nuanced understanding of the Chinese-American merchant class.